

[Goddard2Goddard: Introduction to a new series of letters](#)

Waiting for Goddards: Corresponding Theologies

Who are we?

Andrew Goddard is Tutor in Christian Ethics at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford and Giles Goddard is Rector of St Peter's Church, Walworth, South London. Giles is also Chair of Inclusive Church while Andrew is on the Leadership Team of Fulcrum and a scholar of the Anglican Communion Institute.

What are we doing?

We agreed just before Christmas to correspond with each other over the next few months on matters relating to the challenges facing the Anglican Communion and the Church of England and to publish our exchanges online. The correspondence will appear on both the Fulcrum and Inclusive Church sites although both of us are writing in a personal capacity. We do this knowing we initially come with different perspectives on many of the major presenting issues (the nature of Anglicanism, life in communion, the Windsor Report, Lambeth I.10 on sexual ethics etc) and eager to explore these together.

Why are we doing this?

The idea for this open correspondence arose out of our own personal conversations and growing friendship over the last year. We got to know each other in the context of a consultation organised to dialogue over matters of sexuality and then by working together across that divide on an initiative to encourage all Christians to put into practice the Primates' statement that 'the victimisation or diminishment of human beings whose affections happen to be ordered towards people of the same sex is anathema to us'. We have become aware of the value of listening to each other's perceptions, finding common ground, and trying to understand our different outlooks on the present and visions for the future. We also realise that many are confused and concerned about the challenges we are facing as a Communion, are often unclear as to what the differences are, and regularly presented with them in a confrontational manner with the challenge to join one 'side' or the other.

Websites of concerned groups and networks understandably often only publish views they support and they can sometimes misrepresent or caricature those with whom they disagree. We hope we may find a way of avoiding such pitfalls.

What are we hoping to achieve?

One of the exciting but also daunting features of this exercise is that we really don't know where it will go and we know that with the Primates' Meeting in February 2007 and General Synod debating human sexuality and civil partnerships later that month there are rocky waters ahead. We talked of planning out an agenda for discussion but decided instead to see how it develops and trust God will guide us as to what and how to discuss matters with each other. As in any genuine dialogue and mutual listening we know we will be changed but we don't know exactly how. Our hope and prayer is that we may all learn and find a way forward as we seek to heed Paul's words to the Ephesians:

I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God

and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all...So then, putting off falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil...Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one other, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Can others join in?

If you want to discuss any points raised there is an opportunity to do so on the Fulcrum Forum.

If you want to contact either or both of us our emails are giles@in-spire.org.uk and andrew.goddard@wycliffe.ox.ac.uk although we hope you will understand that our work commitments mean we may not be able to respond to your email personally.

Finally, are we related?

Not as far as we know !

Goddard2Goddard letter 1: Giles to Andrew (19th Dec 2006)

19th December 2006

Dear Andrew,

I write with some trepidation – I have to say it feels a bit like going into the lion’s den! Thank you for agreeing to a correspondence.

On the occasions we’ve met recently I’ve been struck by how much there is which unites us - not just a common surname but also a deep passion and a deep commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it’s been handed down within the Anglican tradition. It seems to me too that we share a sense of grief that the situation could have reached the point which it has now reached.

I’m writing to you, therefore, in the hope that a calm and reasoned discussion in the context of shared faith and mutual respect might enable some light to be thrown on the underlying causes of the current situation, as well as finding and affirming the common ground we have as Christians first and Anglicans second. Clearly there is also much upon which we do not agree. But my hope is that we can reaffirm the commonality of our faith as a basis from which we can identify ways to live together within the diversity that is the Anglican Communion.

I am writing to you in a personal capacity, but there may be points at which it is helpful to try to set out some of the thinking of InclusiveChurch and why we have responded as we have to the present situation.

We are both very aware of the history of the C of E and of the way in which it has grown and become part of the Anglican Communion. But it bears remembering as the foundational context from which we come. I understand the C of E to have reached maturity under Elizabeth I, who, horrified by the religious violence which had preceded her reign, sought very definitely, as it says in the preface to the 1662 Book of Common Prayer “to keep the mean between the two extremes, of too much stiffness in refusing and too much easiness in admitting any variation from it.” That refers to our liturgical practice, clearly. But I still remember the shock of recognition when, at school, I happened across it during a more than usually uninspiring sermon.

Elizabeth did not wish to make “windows into men’s souls”; she did want to create a religious “vehicle” which had a commonality of practice and a commonality of core doctrine without excluding those who held differing interpretations of that practice and doctrine.

In short, our church is both catholic and reformed. We are by no means the only denomination which holds varieties of belief within a common context - I was privileged to train for ordination alongside Methodists and members of the URC and was struck and re-struck by, once again, our similarities with them. That may be something to do with the fact that we are all trying to work out the implications of the love of Jesus in our lives, and it may also have something to do with the fact that English Christianity became very early on a

fusion – of Catholic and Celtic, to begin with! But right at the core of our practice and faith is a commitment to the historicity and catholicity of the faith held in tension with the insights and lessons of the reformation. And we owe a debt deeper than measurable to the (admittedly complicated!) work of Richard Hooker and his fellow divines who forged that understanding in the white heat of controversy, bringing us towards what is defined in shorthand as the theological approach based on “scripture, reason and tradition.”

The tension that that involves is being lived out as I write. It was also perceived by the Bishops of the American church in Chicago as reaffirmed by the Lambeth Conference in 1888

“The following Articles supply [a basis for Christian unity]:

1. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as "containing all things necessary to salvation," and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.
2. The Apostles' Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.
3. The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself - Baptism and the Supper of the Lord - ministered with unfailing use of Christ's words of Institution, and of the elements ordained by Him.
4. The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church.

As adopted by the Lambeth Conference of 1888, Resolution 11 “

I wish also to pay tribute to the Thirty Nine Articles and the history of the Church of England with its constant dialectic of reformation and catholicism – the nineteenth century in particular, with the Oxford Movement and the great protestant revivals, and the twentieth century with the changes and development in liturgical practice which have both freed us up and brought us to the point where we now find ourselves.

Enough history, already! But out of all this I take one overriding point – that it's very hard to say, precisely, what Anglicanism is. I have attended St Andrew's North Oxford on a number of occasions with my sister and have appreciated the worship there; in some ways it's a far cry from St Peter's Walworth and in others it's very close. I think the closeness is found in the fact that neither in North Oxford nor in Walworth do we expect to impose an understanding of the faith; rather, the expectation is that each of us will do our best to understand our faith within the context we find ourselves, and it is the role of clergy and teachers to provide the theological and liturgical resources to enable people to discover a relationship with Jesus for themselves.

I can see that there is a danger we may end up writing a book to each other. But before finishing this letter I want to touch on the locus of authority in Anglicanism because that, it seems to me, is the core of our problem. J Robert Wright has written a paper which can be found at <http://anglicanhistory.org/essays/wright/bishoy1990.pdf> which sets out well the

way in which authority in Anglicanism is perceived as “dispersed” – distributed across a number of institutions without any one of those institutions holding sway. In today’s incredibly complex world, that breadth of authority can be seen as at least unsettling and possibly threatening, and I’m sure it is partly because of that that some parts of the church are keen to identify clearer, more delineated understandings of Christian life and faith.

The Bishop of Southern Malawi, in a recent lecture,
(<http://www.aco.org/listening/world/docs/doc2.cfm>) quotes from Jean Vanier:

“Welcome is one of the signs that a community is alive. To invite others to live with us is a sign that we aren’t afraid, that we have a treasure of truth and of peace to share’ He also offers an important warning: ‘A community which refuses to welcome – whether through fear, weariness, insecurity, a desire to cling to comfort, or just because it is fed up with visitors – is dying spiritually.’

I welcome this dialogue with you -

Yours in Christ

Giles Goddard

[Goddard2Goddard Letter 2: Andrew to Giles \(13th Jan 2007\)](#)

13th January 2007

Dear Giles,

A belated Happy New Year and welcome back from your travels. I am sorry that I'm only just getting round to replying to your message from before Christmas.

I am really excited at where this conversation could go and how others may join in or start their own conversations across the different divides we are so aware of in the Church of England and the Communion. As you say we mustn't let those disagreements mask what we have in common and I share your conviction that it is by building personal relationships and talking that we can realise the importance of that and also discern the nature and depth of our disagreements and what they might mean for our life together. It's been great to begin to do that with you at the Windsor Consultation and since and I look forward to it continuing.

Part of our agreement is obviously – thankfully – found in features of Anglican identity such as being both catholic and reformed, the wisdom found in the BCP (and of such value during boring sermons!), and the importance of Scripture, tradition and reason. As someone brought up a Presbyterian in Scotland those are all aspects I have discovered in Anglicanism which I treasure. But increasingly I sense that - under the surface issue of homosexuality – we also share worries and anxieties that what we particularly treasure in Anglicanism is under threat at present.

I sense that many of those I know linked to Inclusive Church see in the recent growth of evangelical Anglicanism, and particularly some of its expressions elsewhere in the Communion, a real threat to the valuable tradition of diversity and development which you highlight and they fear the Communion covenant project may try to define more closely what Anglicanism is and make us a more rigidly confessional church. For myself and other evangelicals a major concern is that we will abandon the supreme authority of Scripture as 'the revealed Word of God' (Quadrilateral) and the subordination of the church to Scripture. That understanding is for me clearly summed up in the Article stating that 'it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of Salvation' (Article 20). Perhaps if we can somehow better understand and be sensitive to each other's concerns here we could lower the temperature in some of the discussions.

It was interesting to read Wright's paper which I'd not come across so thanks for that link. Although highlighting the reality of dispersed authority it also confirmed my memory of just how clear a boundary the Articles have provided through most of English Anglicanism. Lis and I read them on our pre-ordination retreat and were reminded how important they were to us, although I think we were both glad we don't have to 'willingly and ex animo subscribe to...all things that are contained in them' (as required until 1865)! Still, that requirement and

the fact that even after 1865 all clergy needed to ‘assent to the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, and to the Book of Common Prayer and of the ordering of bishops, priests, and deacons’ and state ‘I believe the doctrine of the Church of England as therein set forth’ is a reminder that diversity and inclusivity have often had quite strongly defined limits within Anglicanism. Given that, by agreement of Synod and Lambeth Conferences, the Articles and Prayer Book no longer define those limits in that way in either the CofE or the Communion, the issue you highlight of the ‘locus of authority’ is particularly pressing and one I suspect we will keep coming back to in different ways.

For myself I believe our current difficulties arise because both the authority of Scripture and the authority of the church are being rejected or undermined. While I suspect I have a more critical view of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral than you do, it is interesting to go back to its original context in the motion of 1886 adopted by the American House of Bishops. It was of course not offering a definition of Anglican identity but clearly stating simply what was ‘essential’ (‘the inherent parts of this sacred deposit’ of ‘Christian Faith and Order committed by Christ and his Apostles to the Church unto the end of the world, and therefore incapable of compromise or surrender’) in order to ‘restore’ Christian unity ‘among the divided branches of Christendom’. And – given that our unity now is under pressure within our own branch in part because of the American church – it is significant that it was prefaced by the statement

We, Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, in Council assembled as Bishops in the Church of God, do hereby solemnly declare to all whom it may concern, and especially to our fellow-Christians of the different Communions in this land....that in all things of human ordering or human choice, relating to the modes of worship and discipline, or to traditional customs, this Church is ready in the spirit of love and humility to forego all preferences of her own

More recently, of course, the General Convention was also clear that on human sexuality issues there was a need for ‘a broad consultation’ to be initiated on an official pan-Anglican and ecumenical level as a bold step forward in the consideration of these potentially divisive issues which should not be resolved by the Episcopal Church on its own’ (B020, 1991, italics added).

I think we’re agreed that such consultation and listening needs to be taking place and that refusing to engage in this with one another in love as brothers and sisters in Christ is sometimes part of the problem. My concern is that unless this is set in an agreed context of limits to action, mutual accountability, and restraint on innovations, the conversation will prove impossible especially if provincial actions lead to the Communion, and perhaps the CofE, experiencing radical realignment. If the framers of the Quadrilateral were – in order to gain unity - willing to ‘forego all preferences’ of their own when those were well established and ‘traditional customs’, I struggle to see why – out of Christian love and concern for unity - it is too much for a similar patience and reserve when what is proposed is a significant new development.

I hope we may explore both what that might look like and whether it is possible and that you will also challenge me and those who share my views and concerns concerning how we

need to change our approach in order to assist such genuine dialogue and – to pick up your challenging quote from Vanier – become more welcoming. Personally I think the Windsor Report and ongoing Windsor Process focussed on the covenant offer the best framework for a way forward. Although what that means in practice remains rather blurred it may all be a bit clearer just over a month from now when the Primates have met.

Hopefully we can each find time in our schedules to write a bit more frequently than I've managed over Christmas and New Year so that we've covered a bit more ground before that meeting and General Synod (with its two proposed debates relating to sexuality and civil partnerships) take place next month.

Look forward to hearing from you

Yours in Christ,

Andrew Goddard

Goddard2Goddard letter 3: Giles to Andrew (18th Jan 2007)

18th January 2007

Dear Andrew

Many thanks for yours dated 13th January. I had a good time abroad – two weeks in India certainly brings a chastening perspective to the struggles within the Communion, particularly as India seems to be able to contain an astonishing level of religious diversity with remarkably little difficulty (apart from the occasional riot!)

I'm glad you focus initially on the Articles. I think they're a neglected resource for the Church of England – I re-read them last year to remind myself of this particular foundational aspect of our Church and was pleased that I could find little to disagree with. Frivolously, I was encouraged by XXXII - "Bishops, priests and deacons are not commanded by God's Law, either to vow the estate of single life, or to abstain from matrimony" - which has interesting implications if we consider it in terms of the Bishops' response to the Civil Partnership legislation. More seriously, I take continual comfort from XXVI – "Of the Unworthiness of the Ministers, which hinders not the effect of the Sacrament". The acknowledgement that the effectiveness of the Sacrament is not hindered by the worthiness or unworthiness of the Minister has significant implications both for the debate over the (now) consecration of women as bishops and for the questions we are considering about lesbian and gay clergy. Although the article is phrased in terms of good and evil, behind that lies the acknowledgement that the sacraments "are effectual because of Christ's institution and promise" – I often think that if we focused a bit more on the sacraments and less on who was administering them the Church would be a better place!

But perhaps I'm simply showing my churchmanship. I take, absolutely, your reference to Articles VI and XX; our understandings of the place, interpretation and authority of Scripture is completely central to this discussion and I very much want to return to that. But before I do, I want to agree with you that the Articles are no longer as key within Anglican authority as they were; as you and I both know very well, the ordination service now asks ordinands to confirm their belief in 'the faith which is revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds and to which the historic formularies of the Church of England bear witness'.

Which doesn't take us very much further in terms of the locus of authority within the Church. I'm glad you provided some context for the origination of the Chicago/Lambeth Quadrilateral, and I very much want to respond to your comments on the recent actions of the Episcopal Church (TEC) and the whole Windsor context. But I'm wary of doing that too soon in our correspondence, since it seems to me that far too much of the situation in the Church of England is the result of fallout from the disagreements within TEC. Clearly we are part of a wider context, but I have serious concerns that some of the more vocal parts of the Religious Right in the States have actively sought to involve the CofE in their relationship with the rest of TEC - and succeeded. I am keen to see if we as the Church of England have anything unique to offer this debate.

I think we have. It is hard, for instance, to imagine a correspondence like this one taking place on any of the more evangelical websites in the US. I think that, however diminished it may be, there is still a powerful recognition within the CofE of the three strands, broadly termed Evangelical, Liberal and Catholic. And there is a recognition among most of us that these strands all have something particular, a special perspective, to offer the life of the Church as a whole. It is, as you say, increasingly clear that much of the heat and light that is being generated at present is a result of fear – fear on the side of conservative evangelicals that Scripture is being subordinated to the Church, and fear on the side of others (broad church? inclusive?) that their understanding of Scripture and the Church is being subordinated to another, particular, interpretation of Scripture and authority. That fear can be expressed from my point of view in the risk of an increased narrowing of the CofE which would have deeply regrettable consequences for the life of the Gospel in this country and abroad.

What are these perspectives and why are they important? I suspect we all caricature each other. Liberals and Catholics think evangelicals have “sola scriptura” as their battle cry. Catholics and evangelicals accuse the liberals of whispering (politely) “sola persona”; and Catholics are seen as flaunting “sola ecclesia” as the way to salvation. In other words, in our mistrustful moments we think that liberals just go on their feelings, Catholics really just want to do what the Pope says (except when they don’t) and Evangelicals use Scripture as a means of oppression.

I think it’s vital if we are to be able to take forward our common life that we re-acknowledge our varied contributions to the life of the Church and preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And I also think that these caricatures are seriously inaccurate, and we need to have a far deeper understanding of one another’s positions before we even begin to talk about issues in human sexuality (as, in the end, I’m sure we will).

Truth exists behind every caricature. Catholics certainly have a high doctrine of the Church, ritual and church order as expressed particularly through the liturgy. While at times this can slip over into fussiness and appear silly, at its best it offers a powerful and wonderful expression of the mystery and drama of faith which, as the leaders of the Oxford Movement soon discovered, is particularly effective in less verbal cultures – especially in the inner cities, where it is still flourishing. I could go on about this for hours, but the drama of the Holy Week observances here at St Peter’s is, although very powerful, not untypical of the many thousands of churches up and down the country which enable people to participate in a very direct way in the death and resurrection of Jesus. And the continuity we celebrate in the traditional way we worship is, again, a source of great wisdom and richness; as is our understanding of the authority of the Bishop and the different orders and kinds of ministry. And for the avoidance of doubt, the ordination of women as priests and soon as bishops will continue to re-ignite the flame which exists within the Catholic wing of the church.

Liberals certainly take individual responsibility and the need to work out our own salvation equally seriously, and the liberal approach which involves continual questioning and not taking anything for granted or on trust has brought and will continue to bring a deepening understanding of humanity’s place before God. In the Woolwich Episcopal Area we look back to the Honest to God controversy, and although I guess that John Robinson would

probably not be considered very liberal now, there can be no doubt that the debate he unleashed with his book, closely followed by “The Myth of God Incarnate” has focused and developed our theological understanding for the 21st century. I think too of the enrichment brought to current thinking by people like Matthew Fox (“Original Blessing”) and the work of the Jesus Seminar. It’s also true, I think, that the recognition of the centrality of our own responsibility has led to a strong identification by liberals with the need for Christianity to embrace and acknowledge human rights (humanity created in the image of God) with all that that entails.

And evangelicals? Well, I was converted at a Christian house party organised by HTB. And I will always be grateful for the affirmation of a personal relationship with Jesus which I hadn’t previously understood. There can be no doubt that the vibrancy and conviction of the Evangelical wing of the church, together with its focus on Christ and the centrality of scripture, have brought immense gifts into Anglicanism. Indeed a great part of our present discussion is, I think, due to the process of adjustment which the CofE is making in recognition of the growth of evangelical churchmanship in the last fifty years.

As another caricature, one could say that Catholics represent “tradition”, liberals “reason” and evangelicals “scripture.”

But the mistake I think we often make is to identify each group too exclusively with its defining characteristic. I have been very encouraged recently by the response by many senior evangelicals to the “covenant” circulated just before Christmas. Clearly a serious doctrine of the Church is not the preserve only of Catholics; and of course we are all, all the time, using our faculties of reason and discernment to understand our faith more deeply. Faith seeking understanding, indeed.

And scripture? I want to try to set your mind at rest on this. Because I suspect that the perception amongst some evangelicals is that the rest of us simply don’t care about scripture and only refer to the Bible when it suits us. Nothing could be further from the truth.

As you know, the Eucharistic form in Common Worship divides the service into the “Liturgy of the Word” and the “Liturgy of the Sacrament.” The Word is as central as the Sacrament; the two go together. Scripture is the wellspring from which our faith arises, and I have no hesitation in agreeing with that scripture contains all things necessary for salvation, and that “it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything contrary to God’s word.”

The question is, therefore, why do - or how can - we disagree? Is there not one interpretation of Scripture which is normative and authoritative? Perhaps that’s the key question for us – in a conversation recently with someone considerably more hardline than you we ended up focusing on the meaning of “arsenikoitai” as if once we could agree on that the whole debate would come to an end.

The readings set for Sunday include Nehemiah 8.5 – “So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.”

Precisely. Apart from a slightly top-down aspect in this particular situation, isn't that what we're all doing? Trying to give the sense, so that people understand the reading?

I'm presently reading work by the French Protestant theologian Paul Ricoeur. One of his many insights is that the Bible works as a whole precisely BECAUSE of its diversity; the way in which it includes narrative, poetry, prophecy, law, history, story, hymns and more. No one part can be taken in isolation; each informs the other. I would be doing you a serious disservice if I thought you weren't fully aware of the need to take each part of the Bible in context, but for the purposes of this correspondence I'm stating the obvious.

In your recent newsletter for Fulcrum on the Listening Process (<http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/news/2006/newsletter10.cfm?doc=149>) you say "Almost all of us who have changed our understanding of what Scripture teaches on some issue (and if we have never done that we must seriously ask whether Scripture is in any sense authoritative in our lives) have done so, in part, as a result of particular experiences that have opened up new questions and helped us shed what we believe is new light on God's Word."

Speaking for myself, I want to say that the Bible is central to my preaching, my faith and my life. But I cannot take particular verses in isolation and use them to justify a position which flies in the face of my understanding of the whole of scripture. If, in the end, the Bible is about the loving relationship between God and God's people, and if, in the end, Jesus came "to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind" (Sunday's other reading), then that is the context in which we have to understand particular verses. I resist the use of particular verses as "proof texts"; rather, I try to encourage people to be in relationship with the whole Bible as they are in relationship with God.

For that reason I'm wary about going down the road of looking specifically at the references we both know so well. I suppose for me the real question is whether we as a Church can agree that different positions on the expression of human love and sexuality can be held by Christians who respect one another's integrity. If we could, then we could move on to work out an ethic of relationship which is genuinely inclusive; and the application of the Instruments of Unity would become a great deal more straightforward... and chocolate drops would rain from heaven.

I look forward very much to your response –

With every good wish

Giles

Goddard2Goddard letter 4: Andrew to Giles (31st Jan 2007)

31st January 2007

Dear Giles,

Thanks for your swift reply and sorry for longer turnaround from me. I'll plead I had a bit more work to do for the Aff Cath conference last Saturday as I was giving a paper! I'm still processing that day but it powerfully made real to me both how there can be genuine hospitality, fellowship and mutual listening but also how little of that there has been and how deep some of the differences are.

Thanks for picking up what I said about the Articles. I'll avoid going too far into sacramental theology debates but while agreeing on the truth and comfort found in Article XXVI I'd add that this does not mean the church should have no regard for the minister's pattern of life as both Scripture (eg the Pastoral epistles) and the canons make clear. I'd also want to say 'I often think that if we focused a bit more on Christ and less on the sacraments and who was administering them the Church would be a better place'. But perhaps it's now my turn to show my churchmanship!

One final point on the Articles - 'no longer as key within Anglican authority as they were' we can agree on but how good this development is remains a serious question. After all, the CofE still says they are 'agreeable to the Word of God' and continues to define Anglican doctrine in relation to them – "The doctrine of the Church of England is grounded in the Holy Scriptures, and in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures. In particular such doctrine is to be found in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, The Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal" (canon A5).

I found your picture of the three strands fascinating and could echo much but also felt a little uneasy in places. I've struggled to work out why and am still not totally sure. In part I think – paradoxically - it was the very strong focus on Scripture in relation to evangelicalism. Not that that is wrong or irrelevant I hasten to add but rather that it may be too reductionistic. This emphasis goes alongside other key features such as preaching and living the gospel of grace which has at its centre an understanding of our plight as condemned sinners and forgiveness and justification simply through trusting in Christ and supremely his death on the cross as our representative and substitute. All that of course is there in the Articles and so 'mainstream' Anglicanism but these are also evangelical distinctives more widely.

I think that bigger picture of evangelicalism is important as increasingly some believe the presenting issues and different responses to them in the Communion are not only due to different views of the authority or interpretation of Scripture but are revealing there may also ultimately in some cases be different gospels. If that is so then Galatians 1 warns us our correspondence may hot up!

I think my deeper concern with your account was that it seemed to assume these three strands were known and a sort of given, that they were rather fixed, and that all of them (by

definition) had unquestioned legitimacy and their views must therefore be in some sense affirmed as integral to Anglicanism. To be honest I think Oliver O'Donovan's recent writing has shown how one challenge we are now facing is not only the growth of evangelicalism but also the fact the 'liberal' strand has altered recently. I'm also I confess far from convinced that 'Honest to God', 'Myth' and the Jesus Seminar have brought 'enrichment' or 'focused and developed our theological understanding' but again that discussion is problem for another time and place.

My concern is that this way of understanding Anglican identity can become predominantly - even wholly - a sociological account of the church and its different parties/traditions where there are no biblical or theological criteria of truth, except perhaps the commitment never to exclude and never to say that certain actions are illegitimate and mean we must recognize communion to be severely impaired or even broken. Perhaps here I caricature but as you say 'truth exists behind every caricature' and I trust you quickly to correct any misunderstandings.

I realise that saying this may come across as a frightening and threatening call to purify Anglicanism and purge it of non-evangelicals or at least of liberals and your Inclusive Church appeal again highlights that as a real fear. I don't think that is what I am seeking at all but perhaps need to unpack a bit more why I am an evangelical Anglican. I am an evangelical by conviction through commitment to such matters as the supreme authority of Scripture, the centrality of the cross and Christ's atoning death, the priority of mission including evangelism and the call for conversion. I am an Anglican by conviction not only because I see those central evangelical marks as central to Anglicanism. It is also because, as an evangelical Christian seeking to be faithful to Scripture, the church is also important and I am aware those evangelical emphases on their own can and have led to some evangelicals losing sight of this and other important aspects of Christian belief and discipleship.

Anglicans from a 'catholic' tradition remind me of the importance of the whole church and Christian tradition (not least for reading of Scripture) and the need to set my evangelical emphases in the context of worship and relate Word to sacrament. 'Liberals' remind me I need to be open to new insights and developments, to question received wisdom and not (in Archbishop Rowan's words) 'close down unexpected questions too quickly'. They also (as you note through reference to human rights) have a passion for justice and require me to take seriously the social, political and intellectual contexts of both Scripture and our contemporary mission field.

To be honest I think all of these are also part of evangelicalism at its best but as evangelicalism is - like all human traditions - rarely at its best I'm grateful to be in an Anglican Communion where other traditions can often more faithfully bear witness to these features of following Jesus. I am also excited by the way in which Anglicanism in recent decades has embraced and greatly benefited from the experience of charismatic renewal, helping us to reunite Word and Spirit while reiterating in new ways the importance of worship, the contemporary leading and power of the Spirit and the importance of every Christian's ministry.

My vision is therefore of a church in which these different emphases - whatever labels we put on them - are able to learn from each other as together we hear and obey God's word to us in Scripture. But the strands identified with them also need to be tested by Scripture rather than simply accepted and included as they present themselves. That means any group - 'evangelicals', 'catholics' or 'liberals' – and the church as a whole may need to be challenged when their emphases become unbalanced, depart from Scripture and lose connection with the other aspects of Anglicanism.

I realize evangelicals can think they have a monopoly on Scripture and hope I don't portray you or others as people who 'don't care about Scripture'. I'm also encouraged you accept I try too to recognise the diversity in Scripture, the need to read it as a whole, and the - to varying degrees - contested nature of biblical interpretation. But I do think there are still quite significant differences here and that these are being played out in relation to sexuality at present. I well recall one prominent Inclusive Church supporter once telling me that the reason he thought evangelicals were fighting this one so hard was that though they might be able to persuade themselves and others that women's ordination was in line with their view of the authority and interpretation of Scripture, if they gave in on homosexuality they'd have to abandon some basic beliefs about Scriptural authority which are core to evangelicalism. I think that is indeed part of the problem at present because I have to say that I think all I've just outlined about my self-understanding as an evangelical Anglican is what leads me to the position I take on sexuality and that I cannot see how my vision of Anglicanism is compatible with what I hear you and others to be calling for.

On 'the texts' I agree that determining the exact meaning of Greek words can be tedious and it certainly won't bring the whole debate to the end. But it can highlight significant differences in understanding biblical authority. What if we could (to take the example you give) both agree that arsenokoitai in 1 Cor 6 and 1 Tim 1 does basically mean 'a man who has sex with a man', that Paul likely coins it from the prohibition in Leviticus, and that he therefore sees this as a sin incompatible with the rule of God and contrary to the gospel? Interestingly Chris Sugden has recently written on this matter that, "when, in discussion, a leading clergy gay campaigner was asked: "If it could be proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that arsenokotai in scripture meant men having sex with men, and not male prostitutes, would you change your view and behaviour?" and answered 'no', the issue is not personal preference, but orthodoxy in teaching and practice". Given you 'have no hesitation in agreeing...that 'it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything contrary to God's word' I would take it such agreement (or "proof") would put you in quite a different place in current discussions and that conversation between us on such matters is therefore not totally pointless or are we perhaps agreeing on that Article on 'contrary to God's word' but understanding it in significantly different ways?

In summary, I think the stance I take on sexuality and the current situation in the Communion fits the vision of Anglicanism I've just outlined in a way no other stance does. It is I believe fully biblical and I take encouragement in that belief from the fact that the church down the ages and across the world today read Scripture as opposed to homosexual practice whereas all other readings are very recent novelties and held by only a small proportion of Christians. The fact that the bishops from around the world at Lambeth 1998 so overwhelmingly took that view and judged the church could not bless same-sex unions or

ordain those in them also means I see it as genuinely 'catholic' and hence those who reject such teaching and practice as the real 'schismatics'. As Archbishop Rowan says in his Hope and Challenge, the question is "whether the Christian Church has the freedom, on the basis of the Bible, and its historic teachings, to bless homosexual partnerships as a clear expression of God's will". Though, as he notes, this "is disputed among Christians" it is true "as a bare matter of fact, only a small minority would answer yes to the question". However, I also recognize that we are facing new challenges and understandings today and so need to keep on listening and learning and particularly struggling to combat all "victimisation or diminishment of human beings whose affections happen to be ordered towards people of the same sex" (The Primates at Dromantine). It concerns me that some evangelicals and others are not always so clear on these last points but unless Anglican churches work within the current teaching and practice of the Communion I fear we will find it impossible to keep on walking together.

You long for the day when 'we as a Church can agree that different positions on the expression of human love and sexuality can be held by Christians who respect one another's integrity' and 'we could move on to work out an ethic of relationship which is genuinely inclusive'. It would help me if you could explain a bit more what you mean by 'integrity' (I don't see you as duplicitous or deceiving and accept that you see your views as genuinely Christian but I find the word 'integrity' difficult given I believe the views are wrong). I also find 'inclusive' strange here and wonder why it is the test of an 'ethic of relationship' as I think any ethic is inherently exclusive as it rules out certain actions as wrong.

The reality is of course that we are manifestly very far from that day and many of us could not welcome it but would struggle to see how such a new ethic would be faithful to Scripture or in continuity with Church teaching on marriage and chastity down the centuries. The question – as you say – is 'how can we disagree?'. I am happy to do so within the parameters of official teaching and discipline laid down by the Communion and the Church of England but I know you and others find that a yoke too heavy to bear. What, I wonder, can we do to lighten that load or bear it with you without having to abandon the fundamental theological and biblical convictions and vision of being Anglican I've outlined?

Look forward to hearing from you

Andrew.

Goddard2Goddard letter 5: Giles to Andrew (8th Feb 2007)

8 February 2007

Dear Andrew,

I was glad to have the chance to meet yesterday. Your last letter, dated 31 January, gave me pause for thought and I needed to work out the best way to respond. Your very clear restatement of your position led me to question what we're trying to achieve through this correspondence, and I wish to touch on that and a couple of other matters arising from your letter before turning to the central questions.

You finished by asking "What, I wonder, can we do to lighten that load or bear it with you without having to abandon the fundamental theological and biblical convictions and vision of being Anglican I've outlined". To which I have to say my immediate response was less than positive. But after a couple of hours I began to ask myself whether we're not at risk in this correspondence of digging ourselves into positions from which we can't move. What, I wondered, would "winning" look like? It is unlikely that you will suddenly say "Giles, I agree with every word you say and will happily bless a civil partnership tomorrow", and it's unlikely that I will say "Andrew, I agree my sexuality is objectively disordered and I repent of all my sexual acts and agree never to do any more." But at the same time it's unlikely that either of us will leave the church. So are we condemned to an endless restatement without resolution?

I hope not. I am certainly finding this dialogue helpful in encouraging me to think seriously about the implications of my position in relation to the whole spectrum of the faith tradition of which I am a part. But, clearly, the jury's out. We may in the end have to agree to disagree and battle on. In the meantime I think we are proceeding in hope and love.

I took great comfort from the consanguinity I find in our understanding of the gospel and the church. I have no problem in assenting to "the supreme authority of Scripture, the centrality of the cross and Christ's atoning death, the priority of mission including evangelism and the call for conversion." I may not use those words in quite those ways, and we may find our understanding of them to be different. But the Lent Course for this parish is focusing in depth on Isaiah 1-39 and Isaiah 40. After Easter we are having an outreach week which will involve knocking on every door in the parish and asking residents what, if anything, they would like us to pray for, and (among other things) offering an introduction to Christianity course. We hope this will continue to bring more people to understand the Gospel and sustain and develop the growth of the church here. And the regular congregation (which is up to around 130 most Sundays) is in no doubt of the need for repentance and life change, constantly and profoundly. Evangelical Catholic Anglican, perhaps?

Labels are dangerous because they define, and one of the things I am increasingly realising is that labels don't work because they're too narrow. A constant discussion within IC is whether we're liberal, catholic, evangelical, orthodox, traditional, revisionist or just plain Christian. Or all of the above. But after a bit we stop worrying and get on with the job of

trying to live and preach the Gospel. So yes, my three categories were a bit simplistic - perhaps they've served their purpose and we can move on.

But before I finally respond to the meat of your letter, I think there's a definite need to humanise the discussion. So far it's all been very theoretical. So: two vignettes.

First, a member of a congregation near here, "John" has been with his partner "Mark" for over twenty years. They are both teachers. John has a profound faith. Mark was strongly evangelical in his teens and early twenties but as a result of serious bruising (for all the normal reasons) he no longer has any time for the church or Christianity.

Two years ago, John and Mark adopted two boys aged seven and five. (Or rather, John adopted as a single person but with the support and involvement of Mark.) The boys had been with three families before then; all three placements had broken down; and it was becoming increasingly likely that they would spend the rest of their childhood in care. The boys are now thriving, receiving astonishing care and support, being brought up Christian and developing in every way. John and Mark, together with the boys, are celebrating their civil partnership in the summer. They're not going near a church. I think that's a shame.

I mention this not because it's topical and not to be provocative. On one of the Fulcrum message boards recently the question was asked, whether there are any examples of the redemptive power of God's love in same-sex relationships. The questioner need look no further. This seems to me to be an example of nourishing and nurturing love at its best. Family life.

Second, a West African member of my congregation hasn't been to church for two years. There are a number of reasons for that, but last week he rang me up and asked if we could meet. It turns out that he had been coming under pressure from friends and colleagues not to come here because of this church's policy on inclusion. He and I have discussed these matters before many times, but our conversation last week was very moving. He came back to church on Sunday and the congregation was delighted that he and his wife have returned.

You'll remember that 70% of the congregation here are of West African or Caribbean origin; some of them are lesbian or gay. Many more are deeply traditional. They are part of this church for many reasons, but at heart must be that fact that here they can encounter God and Jesus in a way which helps them to grow in their faith.

No theology can possibly be built on the back of anecdote and I have no doubt you could find powerful stories of the effectiveness of a more conservative approach. But my point is that we are not talking in a vacuum. We are dealing with real people's lives, faith and loves and in that context we have to tread carefully, lest we tread on their dreams.

And in that context I'm afraid I have to say that I don't think your position is sustainable. I don't think it's sustainable biblically, theologically, pastorally or ecclesiologically.

First, biblically. Clearly we could spend a great deal of time discussing *malakoi*, *arsenokotai*, Romans 1 and so on. But I hope you'll understand if I say that I'm not sure that's a good use

of our time - that discussion is going on elsewhere. One of the most refreshing things about this correspondence is the way in which it seems to be resonating with Fulcrum members and be alongside some of their concerns, and the message boards are very full of conversation about scripture. I'd very much like to hear a conversation between you and Simon Butler, for instance, on these matters. But it is clear to me that we can't really any more say that there is only one possible understanding of the voice of scripture on matters of same-gender relationships.

I think there is a more fundamental problem about your approach. It's tied up with the question of authority. The problem, stated baldly, is that it's inconsistent.

My InclusiveChurch colleague was on to something when he talked about the question of the ordination of women. But I would say that the problem is not that the issue of sexuality may cause you to abandon strongly held beliefs; the problem is that you have *already* interpreted scripture and changed your views, as you acknowledge in your piece on the Listening Process. The difficulty for me is that nowhere in this discussion, either with you or with other people, have I found a credible explanation as to why this question is methodologically separate from all the other questions of which we are both aware.

Clearly the issues are different, but it's not clear to me that the method is. The question of the position of women is clearest, but divorce, slavery and usury are equally applicable. It is beyond doubt that a far stronger scriptural justification for the subordination of women to men can be made than any justification for the continued rejection of same-gender relationships. But you have moved on this to the extent that you sit opposite an ordained woman every time you have breakfast with your wife (which I assume you do!), and yet you say that the voice of scripture is clear, period, without remainder, on same-gender relationships.

I have to say that in this area I have more respect for the position of Mario Bergner who does not admit the possibility of divorce OR the ordination of women. He is, at least, consistent. Although I suspect he'd draw the line at slavery...

So I repeat, I am fervent in my upholding of scripture as containing "all things necessary to salvation." The question is, on this matter as on so many others, what precisely does it contain?

Which leads on to theology.

Since my last letter I have read Oliver O'Donovan's seventh sermon "Good News for Gay Christians." I think it's a very remarkable piece of work and I greatly appreciate it. Clearly there is much within it I would wish to discuss. But I take one of its central messages to be a call for lesbian and gay people (and their friends) to do some serious theological work in order that levels of engagement can improve. To which I return a loud Amen.

The problem has been until very recently that the only theology we've been able to do has been a theology of resistance. There is no way that I could have entered into this correspondence five years ago: I was far too angry and defensive. For the past forty years

we've been working towards a position where we can say we are "forgiven, loved and free"; that our place in the church is acknowledged and respected; and that our place in creation is not akin to that of a murderer but to that of a black person, a woman or, indeed, a straight man. In other words, that our existence is by definition sinful only in the way in which all humanity is sinful; that we are not specifically, existentially, ontologically sinful to the extent that our love dare not speak its name.

If we were to be able to develop a serious theology for lesbian and gay people, I think it would start with Creation rather than the Fall. It would start with our common humanity rather than that which makes us different. The parallel is with black theology and feminist theology, both of which had to move from a position of having to justify the equality of black people or women with straight white men under the eyes of God to a position of asking "what is God teaching us through the gifts and diversity we bring?" That work has not, to my knowledge, been done yet in areas of human sexuality. It's why this is not a human rights issue but a theological issue.

You may reply that sexual expression is a result of the Fall, not creation, and that the creation of male and female by God defines the order of creation; and that therefore lesbian and gay sexual acts are intrinsically disordered. If you did, you wouldn't be the first. That our similarity is therefore greater to thieves and adulterers than to black people. (I'm aware my analogy breaks down when thinking about black gay people!).

I think we could have a discussion about all that. So when I say your position is unsustainable theologically, what I mean is twofold. First, I think you do not allow for the fact that we live in a provisional world. We await the eschaton, when the wheat will be separated from the tares. Now I'm quite happy to acknowledge that I may well be gathered up with the tares and cast into the outer darkness. But I would also like the opportunity to be considered, potentially, as part of the wheat. Until that day comes, we do not know; our faith is seeking understanding. We have been given two great commandments ("the only two commandments not reducible to law" according to Paul Ricoeur), and our task is to work out what those commandments mean in the world in which we find ourselves. It might, for example, be interesting to know in what way you think the sexual expression of same-gender love breaches those commandments.

And second, I'm not sure that the theology of revelation will necessarily uphold your position. The revelation of Jesus Christ as given to us through the scriptures is the revelation of a person, not a rule book. Sometimes it seems that many who think that homosexuality is contrary to Scripture are operating with a quasi-fundamentalist model of revelation. I mean that they seem to think, perhaps unwittingly, that the authority of the Bible is impugned unless it is wholly inerrant in matters of morals, and not merely inerrant in all things which pertain to our salvation. But with us, now, is the Holy Spirit, leading us haltingly and stumblingly into all truth.

This letter is long enough and I've hardly touched on pastoral and ecclesiological issues. Perhaps those can wait. But I do briefly want to say about pastoral matters that your position is unsustainable because it seems to me that the church's current position is a disaster. We have commented on the difference between the postings on Thinking

Anglicans and Fulcrum. It's quite clear to me that much of the difference comes from anger expressed on TA which covers the deep hurt caused to faithful committed and loving Christians as a result of rejection by the church. The position, and our present arguments, serve only to distance the church further and further from the people we are called to serve; on this, as on so much else, we have much to learn from the secular world. And I refer back to John and Mark - to whom, apparently, the church has nothing positive to say. Why not?

When I say "an ethic of relationship which is genuinely inclusive" of course I don't mean that "anything goes". Inclusion is not libertarianism. It is offering welcome. Of course any ethic is by definition exclusive because it rules out certain actions as wrong. But the question remains, what actions are we ruling out? Actions which breach the two great commandments or actions which are derived from a particular view of Pauline morality?

As a church we have the potential now really to start to think what it means to be "in relationship." How the gifts of the Spirit are expressed in love. How constancy, fidelity, generosity, openness, compassion and trust go to help human flourishing, whether in a civil partnership or in a marriage. It seems to me that that is something to strive for, and something which could offer great benefit to the church. And to the world.

You ask what I mean by "respecting one another's integrity" - given that you think my views are wrong. I'm not quite sure how to answer this, except to say that I have enormous respect for you as a minister and as a person. I'm wrestling with these issues as a result of the fact that I believe we walk better together than apart; and it seems to me that our integrity as Christians sharing a common faith is what binds us together. I am constantly reminded of the Council of Jerusalem and take comfort from the fact that the earliest Christians struggled too. Perhaps that's not quite what you wanted - I'd be grateful for clarification.

And ecclesiastically? I simply want to say that I am aware that there is a sense in which you believe that we, and TEC, are putting the cart before the horse, moving before the church as a whole is ready. The point you make about ours being a "minority" view bears that out. But I question whether that helps your case; many views have in the past been held by a minority but that doesn't necessarily make them wrong. Now whether we are justified in seeking a change, and whether the structures and procedures of the Communion are able to permit that change to happen, is an open question. But I need to refer you to article XXI and remind you that councils may err; and that Lambeth 1.10 in 1998 follows resolutions in 1978 and 1988 (to which Brian Lewis refers in his [article](#) in the Church of England News (5th February) which have a very much more positive approach to the matters we are discussing.

Overall, there is clearly a question of church order and authority. We have agreed that the authority of Anglicanism is dispersed. We may not reach agreement on the precise status of each of the aspects of Anglican authority. But I want to assure you that none of what we within and around IC are doing is undertaken lightly, carelessly or without serious thought. It is precisely because we acknowledge the authority of the church that we are so keen to engage with it. Like you, we have a high doctrine of church! More later on all of this, I hope.

Next week is Tanzania. I suspect we're all dreading it. My hope for Tanzania is that our Primates can break with recent tradition and offer an example to the rest of the Communion - so that we can say "see how these Christians love one another." To date we've seen far too little of that and far too much posturing and power play. I hope that in sharing time and worship and - please God - the eucharist - they will be able to move forward. Together.

With respect and affection,

Giles

Goddard2Goddard letter 6: Andrew to Giles (11th Feb 2007)

11 February 2007

Dear Giles,

It was great to meet up when I was in London last week even if only for an hour or so and to talk face-to-face as well as by these letters. You've packed a lot into your latest in explaining why you think my position is 'unsustainable' and I want to try and reply to each of those areas but first there is the crucial question we touched on and with which you open - 'are we condemned to an endless restatement without resolution?' I also hope that is not so and believe that dialogues such as ours will - however slowly and surreptitiously - make some difference but exactly what and whether it will ever be 'resolution' I just don't know. My question is increasingly that given it is indeed 'unlikely that either of us will leave the church' what does it mean for us to be able to live together as the church, getting on with the sort of tasks you describe - teaching, worship, prayer, outreach, having our lives changed etc. What shape do such disciplines as love of neighbour, self-denial, bearing one another's burdens etc take?

Our fellowship group here at Wycliffe recently shared in a corporate lectio divina of Galatians 5 and among the verses I was struck by for their relevance to the Church of England and the Anglican Communion were the frightening verses - "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."

As I think I said over our drinks on Wednesday, I see the situation as one in which the challenge to me and those who share my views is how - given we believe that what is being proposed for the church is wrong and amounts to asking her to bless and commend what God has declared wrong - we share the gospel and minister with people like John and Mark, teach our views and uphold church discipline graciously while being open to correction ourselves. The challenge I see for you and IC is how to express your dissent as holders of a minority view and engage with the church while acknowledging its authority and respecting its mind, even though you believe it has indeed erred. It is a slight caricature but it sometimes seems there are those who wish simply to silence and excommunicate and those who wish simply to do what they personally believe is right with no regard for the wider church.

As we work more on that - which I'm sure Tanzania and General Synod will bring us back to - there does remain the substantive question and I don't think we can simply put that to the side especially as we each apparently think the other's position (though taking care to see the nuances and avoiding caricature) is unsustainable in some rather fundamental ways. I liked your four-fold categorisation so will reply using it.

Biblically, we could spend much time on specific texts but I understand you may not want to go down that path in detail. I guess my question is at a more general level: Given that it is undeniable that every biblical text referring to same-sex sexual acts speaks of them in terms that fit with a call for repentance (there is no parallel negative univocality in any of the other allegedly comparable issues you cite), on what biblical basis can the church not only refuse to issue that call but even do the opposite and commend contexts for such acts and say that the view such acts are wrong is biblically unsustainable?

Your argument here seems to be that it is on the same basis that I was content to hear my wife preach this morning despite 1 Tim 2.12 and so if I was consistent I would either refuse to attend such services or be as happy to bless a civil partnership as I am to hear a woman preach. I have to confess I don't see the logic here. Precisely because, as you say, 'the issues are different', applying the same method will likely lead to different conclusions. I wish to take each issue in its own right and be consistent in how I read and apply the Scriptures - as a whole and in their specific discussions of each issue. You appear somehow to know even before looking at the texts in detail that because your method leads to a particular view on women's ministry it must lead to a certain view on same-gender relationships and you therefore assume that I am inconsistent, unlike Mario Bergner or some of my more conservative evangelical friends in Reform.

So, I am not arguing that 'this question is methodologically separate from all the other questions of which we are both aware'. Rather I am trying to apply the same method - careful exegesis of biblical texts, in their context, faithful to the canonical witness as a whole and integrated into a biblical theology - and have been led to the conclusions I hold (on sexuality the same as Some Issues in Human Sexuality and Richard Hays in his Moral Vision of the New Testament) with varying degrees of confidence and tentativeness. My suspicion is that you are working with a different interpretive method to me. It seems to be one which privileges a certain understanding of 'inclusion' and 'love' as the hermeneutical key to Scripture and heart of the gospel and then combines this with a particular understanding of sexuality and a framework that categorises such disparate issues as divorce, usury, slavery and women's ordination together. The result is you do not really need to do detailed exegetical work on Romans 1 or 1 Corinthians 6 in order to know the answers to the questions we face today about homosexuality. All this means that I'm afraid therefore that I simply cannot agree with what you hold to be beyond doubt - 'that a far stronger scriptural justification for the subordination of women to men can be made than any justification for the continued rejection of same-gender relationships'.

Theologically, there is I think more agreement between us. I too want clearly to say that any language here about being sinful must be universal and that we must start with our common humanity as those made in the image of God. I'd love to explore this more as I know that what I say and write is often heard as telling gay and lesbian people that they are 'existentially, ontologically sinful' in a uniquely depraved way. If that is indeed what I am saying then I agree with you that it is theologically flawed and unsustainable. I think however that the gap here is often more to do with different interpretations of sexual attraction and orientation and varied understandings of personal identity than to do with competing theologies of creation and fall in general. I am though intrigued as to how your understanding of sexual identity is related to your doctrine of creation. Is the biblical witness that we are made male and female now shown to be inadequate for understanding ourselves as sexual beings? Does it need to be complemented with further distinctions within created order on the basis of sexual orientation - gay male, straight male etc - for a Christian ethic?

I'm afraid your critique relating to living in a provisional world and the wheat and the tares lost me. I think we are all agreed that there are patterns of behaviour inconsistent with Christian discipleship and that this is particularly important in relation to Christian leaders. As a result the church has certain teaching and discipline. But this is surely not to say that those who disagree with the teaching (in theory and in practice) or even those who are subject to church discipline are simply 'gathered up with the tares and cast into the outer darkness.'

Part of the current teaching is against 'the sexual expression of same-gender love' and you ask how these breach the two great commandments. A full answer would be rather long(!) but in outline - knowing how unsatisfactory this will sound - I guess I would say something like this. Love of God is shown in obeying his Word (both law and gospel), fulfilling his good purposes for us, heeding his warnings about conduct incompatible with life in his kingdom, respecting his ordering of creation and the gift of marriage, resisting ungodly desires. Love of neighbour is shown in, seeing others as ultimately belonging not to themselves but to Christ, honouring others' bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit, respecting someone as male or female (I think part of the thinking in Romans 1 is that in sexual relations with the same sex we are exchanging the truth about ourselves as sexually differentiated beings for a lie), protecting and nurturing the gift of friendship love between people as something free from sexual expression. I suspect you will again agree with most of these but then apply them differently but I hope the claim is not totally implausible that in the light of Scripture as a whole the Church has been right to conclude that these broader ethical principles lead to a negative stance on same-gender sexual relationships. I guess my question in return might be to ask you to explain in what way you think the sexual expression of love between two people within the bonds of affinity breaches the great commandments.

On revelation again I can agree that God's revelation is supremely in Christ and that the Spirit leads us into all truth and I am cautious about the language of 'inerrant'. However, I do accept - in the words of the Evangelical Alliance basis of faith - "The divine inspiration and supreme authority of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, which are the written Word of God-fully trustworthy for faith and conduct". I am therefore rather wary about too sharp a distinction between 'matters of morals' and 'our salvation' but that may be for another time...

Pastorally, thank you for sharing the vivid real-life stories you did. Among the most powerful lessons I've learned in recent years through involvement in this discussion is the importance of acknowledging goods that exist within same-sex partnerships and the losses that result from refusing any form of fellowship with those Christians who take a different view from me. Your two examples illustrate and reinforce both those lessons but - as I think you accept - they cannot be the foundation of a whole theology of sexuality. And, yes, there are of course other stories of God at work through a more conservative approach in various ways. I am, I hope, aware that 'we are dealing with real people's lives, faith and loves' and that - as you powerfully remind me - 'we have to tread carefully, lest we tread on their dreams'. But again that must shape the tone and ethos and spirit of what we say but it cannot give us the substantive content and just because something said is unwelcome does not mean it contains 'nothing positive'. I would hope I could recognise and be positive about, for example, the constancy, generosity and compassion that John and Mark show to each other and to their boys which may well outshine that shown in some marriages and traditional family structures. But I don't think it follows that I should bless their civil partnership or commend all aspects of their relationships. I wish that was not felt as 'rejection by the church' and don't think it need be given that there are evangelical churches which have openly gay and lesbian members, some in relationships, while maintaining the position I do.

I'm not surprised you were unsure how to answer my 'integrity' question as to be honest I'm not sure exactly what it is but feel it is important. When we chatted it became a bit clearer as we spoke about 'two integrities' over women's ordination and I said my problem is that although I support that stance there I cannot do so here on this issue. It strikes me that - in describing my view as 'unsustainable' - you may have a similar problem.

Part of my difficulty relates to the final, ecclesiastical point. A minority view needs first to convince the wider church that its position has integrity as a genuinely Christian position rather than just a

position genuinely held by some Christians. Lambeth 1998 and numerous other councils have made clear that this has not yet been achieved. While of course councils may err (General Conventions of one province at least as much as Lambeth Conferences) and historic minorities have become majorities that does not mean we are free to assume councils have erred whenever they disagree with us and that a minority position we hold will be proved right in the future and win the day. I am surprised you think 1978 and 1988 were 'very much more positive'. I think the 1988 one resulted from the rejection of a much more 'positive' one (from your perspective) moved by Bishop Moore of New York and the 1978 one clearly reaffirms heterosexuality as 'the scriptural norm'. So 1998 was clearer and firmer but also fully in line with earlier Lambeth resolutions. It resisted pressures from a small number of bishops concentrated in a few provinces to change Anglican teaching and reaffirmed traditional sexual ethics as biblical while encouraging further study and listening and pastoral sensitivity.

Whether the 'council' of Primates meeting next week will listen and show pastoral sensitivity to one another we wait to see. The signs are not good. It probably won't surprise you to know that my own outlook and hopes are roughly in line with those expressed by what Jim Naughton on his blog calls "the odious trio of N T Wright, Graham Kings and Michael Scott-Joynt." In responding to TEC and supporting Windsor bishops within TEC the Primates have to give a clear signal that we are sadly in the final paragraph of the Windsor Report where it says "We would much rather not speculate on actions that might need to be taken if, after acceptance by the primates, our recommendations are not implemented. However, we note that there are, in any human dispute, courses that may be followed: processes of mediation and arbitration; non-invitation to relevant representative bodies and meetings; invitation, but to observer status only; and, as an absolute last resort, withdrawal from membership". Anything less than that would be to abandon all the slow but significant work of the last three and a half years.

General Convention not only failed to implement the recommendations (and the wording of 'implementation' in that paragraph makes clear that these were never simply suggestions to be modified or selectively heeded). They also elected as their new Presiding Bishop someone the Windsor Report addressed in para 144 when it invited bishops who authorised same-sex blessings "to express regret that the proper constraints of the bonds of affection were breached by such authorisation" and stated that "pending such expression of regret, we recommend that such bishops be invited to consider in all conscience whether they should withdraw themselves from representative functions in the Anglican Communion". The Presiding Bishop's status within the Primates' Meeting must, therefore, be seriously in question and not simply because of the 'posturing and power play' that is undoubtedly also present nor of course because she is a woman.

I hope that whatever difficulties lies ahead for us as churches as a result of decisions next week we can nevertheless move forward as a communion in relation to the covenant. My prayer is that we find ourselves able to walk back together again through reaffirming what we have in common and committing ourselves to patterns of life and decision-making that indeed do show how - despite our disagreements - we Christians love one another. And of course that at the personal level we and others may be able to build (in the name of an internet community where I first learned the importance of dialogue over this) 'bridges across the divide' rather than find ourselves burning bridges.

All the best,

Andrew

Goddard2Goddard letter 7: Giles to Andrew (25th Feb 2007)

25 February 2007

Dear Andrew,

So, after Tanzania, nothing's changed and everything's changed. Nothing's changed because we still have no resolution on the question of human sexuality and the listening process has progressed no further. But everything's changed because the worst fears about the meeting were not realised; there was no split, no formal disciplining of the Episcopal Church, the Presiding Bishop and the Archbishop of York were not excluded, and the Alternative Primatial Oversight requested has not been granted. The only prediction which did come true - sadly - was the absence from the sacrament of communion by some of the Primates.

Clearly Lambeth I.10 has been reaffirmed. Clearly there is work to do by the Episcopal Church on same-sex blessings - slightly unfairly, it seems to me, as the issue of same-sex blessings was originally addressed to the Anglican Church of Canada rather than TEC. There remains the glaring inconsistency, that Lambeth I.10 apparently has a "normative" status and authority which no other Lambeth Conference motion has ever had. But it seems that the half of one point of "Windsor non-compliance" offered an opportunity for conservative Primates to extract a promise, and I have little doubt that Bishop Katherine along with the people of TEC, despite their strong misgivings, will for the sake of the Communion seek to respond.

It seems to me that congratulations are due to Archbishop Rowan and to most of the Primates for the way in which they have sought a way forward out of the impasse in which we appear to be becoming mired. It gives us a responsibility to respond, in which I hope this correspondence will continue to play a part.

In that context I am replying to your last letter dated 11 February. I think at this stage, and following the dialogue in Dar es Salaam (however painful and ill-tempered some of that dialogue was) I need to return to the question of the "listening process."

We've now met four times and exchanged three letters. In that time I have developed a warm understanding of your generosity of spirit and breadth of knowledge. But I am beginning to feel that what began as a "listening process" is in danger of becoming a "banging my head against a wall process". In each of your letters you have, effectively, restated a particular position which may be considered conservative evangelical and challenged me to live with that, although I have tried to suggest a number of ways forward which may enable us to work together - most especially around the question of working out a theology of relationship which is widely applicable.

There is a story of Sidney Smith seeing two women arguing from two tall buildings across a street in Edinburgh. "They'll never agree" he said. "They're arguing from different premises." I wonder if that doesn't begin to apply to us?

It seems to me increasingly clear that we are working under different definitions of what it means to be Anglican. To you, Anglicanism involves a particular attitude to and particular interpretation of scripture, most clearly expressed in your understanding of the meaning and significance of the five texts so often cited in discussions about homosexuality. Apparently, there can be no diversity of interpretation on these texts, and any other interpretation is a deviation from the Anglican position.

To me, Anglicanism places the Bible at the heart of our faith as the book in which the revelation of God's action in the world through Jesus Christ is contained. There is room - there always has been room - for a vast diversity of understandings as to how, precisely, that revelation is understood by our limited human intellects. For that reason we have developed the notion of the three pillars of Anglicanism - scripture, reason and tradition, and we try to work out the commonality of our faith using this Anglican method.

I am repeating this because I think it's at the heart of the difficulties which conservatives are experiencing at the moment. Those of us who might most helpfully be termed "progressive" are very happy to accept that there is a range of views on homosexuality as there is on the ordination of women, divorce, the nature and number of the sacraments, and many other things. We believe that there are core doctrines which are non-negotiable - as expressed in the Nicene Creed - but beyond that we try to live with diversity.

The problem, I am beginning to think, for conservatives is that a recognition of possible diversity on this issue appears to be impossible. The clear statement in your letters to date is that the views I hold are "wrong."

The difficulty that you have is that it follows, logically, that I have no place in your church. Certainly not as a presbyter. Whereas I am very happy to have you in my church, although I acknowledge that you and I do not share the same views on this and possibly on much else.

The result, for me, is that I can hear what you are saying about scripture. But I can then challenge it - I can say, for example, that the distinction you draw between homosexuality and divorce does not seem to me to add up (how do you get past a prohibition by Jesus but insist that a particular interpretation of five marginal references wrenched out of context is unchallengeable?). Or I can say that your assertion that the revised position on women is orthodox and properly Anglican is clearly challenged by the Church Society, and that your position on homosexuality is equally clearly challenged by other evangelical theologians such as Michael Vasey and David Atkinson. You have not given me good reason to think that your interpretation should be privileged above the Church Society or Michael Vasey or David Atkinson. But, recognising that Anglicanism is diverse, I can simply say "case not proven" and come to the altar to share communion with you.

I have been reflecting a great deal on what happened in Dar es Salaam at the Primates' meeting. As you know, we were glad to be able to send Colin Coward of Changing Attitude and Davis Mac-Iyalla of Changing Attitude Nigeria who were joined by Scott Gunn and Caro Hall from the Episcopal Church. We had therefore enough people to be able to witness at first hand what was happening. And what is quite clear is that there was a great deal of anger among the conservative faction at the result - especially, it seems, from Martyn

Minns, but also from several others. For example, I'm told that at least two Primates shouted at Katherine Jefferts Schori in a way which was both hostile and aggressive. And course, the seven Primates absenting themselves from Communion looks very like an attempt to make a political point even if it was not intended as such. Our hearts go out to them, recognising the pain which that must have caused them.

I have read your responses to the Episcopal Church's General Convention in Columbia and to the deliberations of the Subcommittee set up to consider TEC's response to the Windsor Report. A friend of mine described them as "resolutely uncharitable" but they come across to me more as affronted; it's almost as though you are asking how an institution which claims to be Anglican can dare act in such a way, and how a Subcommittee of the Anglican Communion cannot see the outrageousness of TEC's behaviour!

I say these things because I am beginning to wonder whether the conflict in which we are all involved is not a result of these different understandings of Anglicanism. And it seems to me that this conflict is in danger of becoming a sickness which will affect the health and life of the Communion and undermine our mission.

The problem is that my position - our position - is solidly, classically orthodox Anglican. I have said to you before that I was deeply impressed by the Anglican conviction which underlay the deliberations of General Convention 2006. We (progressives) recognise that the Communion did not stop developing with the passage of resolution I.10 at Lambeth 1998; we recognise that we are being led into truth by the Spirit; we derive our position from a proper, detailed consideration of the scriptures in the light of reason and tradition. You implied in your last letter that I read the scriptures expecting to find a certain result; in fact, I reached the views I have on scripture - which required a significant change - after many years of agonised study, reflection, prayer and learning.

It seems to me that homosexuality is, for many conservatives a "presenting cause". Under it lies a desire which, if realised, would bend the Anglican Communion out of shape. Moving it away from the breadth and diversity which has been the Anglican watchword (mainly) since the Elizabethan Settlement and making it into a confessional church more along the lines of some of the reformation churches of the Continent. Thus conservatives are setting up a conflict within themselves - dividing their own house, so to speak - and in dividing their house they are finding it cannot stand. Hence, anger and frustration. Which in its turn finds its way into the progressive part of the church...leading towards a descending spiral out of love and into darkness.

We have to move on. We are bringing the church and the Gospel into disrepute by our undignified and anguished arguments.

We have to rediscover that hermeneutic of love through which we are led to understand the scriptures, so that we can reaffirm the gift we have been given which is the Gospel as lived out through the Anglican Communion.

The listening process needs to form part of this process of moving on. But I am starting to wonder whether conservative evangelicals aren't beginning to fear that a genuine listening

process is a Trojan horse, which will require them to give up dearly held views on human sexuality. And that, as such, it must not be undertaken seriously - more as a sop to lesbian and gay people in exchange for the massive sacrifices we, and TEC, are being asked to undergo.

I think that need not be the case. The problem with our correspondence so far, it seems to me, is that you have not been able to acknowledge that there may be potential that my view might have validity. If you were able to do that, we could then move on to working out what an Anglican Communion which contained different views on human sexuality as expressed in loving relationships might look like. The listening process, to be meaningful, needs, explicitly, to contain a recognition that alternative views may be held with integrity; that those who think like me need not automatically be expelled from the Communion.

The value of theological diversity is not about 'you have your opinion and I have mine'. There are opportunities to learn from one another if there is exchange and sharing. And if people with different experiences and views can worship together, talk and listen to one another and cooperate to try to bring in the Kingdom of God, maybe the Holy Spirit will get a chance to shine through and help us all towards a deeper understanding of the truth.

I acknowledge that there are those who believe that the views I hold and way I love will lead God to reject me, and who believe that they are doing me and everyone else a favour by emphasising how serious it is to accept same-sex relationships as potentially valid. Their understanding of the promises in the Gospels and what Jesus says about the character of God is clearly very different from mine. But in any case, why single this issue out above all others (Anglican churches for instance include peace activists and soldiers whom they may believe have engaged in murder, but somehow they co-exist) and why is it suddenly necessary to achieve uniformity of belief when this has not been the Anglican way through the centuries?

So my question to you and to your fellow conservatives, before we return to the vexed questions around homosexuality, is - are you prepared to allow the potential for a diversity of views on this subject within full members of the Communion? If you are, we can begin to find a way forward together. If not, then, clearly, in the end, a split must come.

I have the prophet Isaiah in my head as we move towards Holy Week and Easter. In particular, second Isaiah. In particular, Isaiah 43:19:

Behold, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

In love and fellowship,

Giles

Goddard2Goddard letter 8: Andrew to Giles (27th Feb 2007)

27 February 2007

Dear Giles,

Thanks for your letter of 25 February and your reflections on where we are in our conversation and where we are as a Communion after Tanzania. Your 'nothing's changed and everything's changed' was particularly striking and while I agree with it I would fill it out quite differently from you.

In the areas where you say 'nothing's changed' I think quite a bit happened. To have Phil Groves (Facilitator for the Listening Process) there talking to the Primates is to my mind quite a significant bit of progress. I hope and trust that more provinces will now take that process forward a lot more seriously and it is clearly going to be important at Lambeth 08. I'm more intrigued by your 'we still have no resolution on the question of human sexuality' as I guess I'm not clear what 'resolution' here means. If 'resolution' means an agreement by everyone that solves all our differences then clearly we are not there(!). However, I think the Primates have not only again reaffirmed I.10 as you say but also made clear that any diocese or province that acts against it leaves its relations with the Communion 'damaged at best, and this has consequences for the full participation of the Church in the life of the Communion'. That principle was clearly behind the request at Dromantine for withdrawal from ACC but I don't think it has ever been stated quite so starkly and that means I think that quite a lot has changed in terms of understanding the current limits of diversity.

You won't be surprised to know that I don't think that we have here a 'glaring inconsistency' in relation to I.10. I've not done the careful research but I think it is unprecedented for a province to disregard a clear, overwhelmingly supported Lambeth resolution that claims the teaching of Scripture as its basis for appealing to provinces not to take certain actions. Going back to women's ordination, although a woman priest had been ordained during the Second World War, when the Lambeth Conference made clear its unhappiness (as it clearly did in 1948) no more such ordinations occurred 'until a new consensus had emerged'. If a province had disregarded those (weaker) resolutions we might have discovered they had quite a 'normative' status and authority.

I shared some of your 'worst fears' and think we indeed owe many congratulations to Archbishop Rowan and others for avoiding a major split. I'm also glad nobody was excluded and, in retrospect, have to admit I can see wisdom in allowing the Presiding Bishop to remain as a full member who signed off on the communique rather than - my preferred option beforehand - reducing her to a diminished, perhaps observer, status due to her own actions as Bishop of Nevada and the actions of her province at General Convention.

I'm pleased the Alternative Primatial Oversight request was not simply granted as I think it needed much more careful work and thought. However, I do think 'everything has changed' in terms of what the Primates did instead to help out those in the US who oppose the actions of the last two General Conventions and stay committed to Communion teaching.

There is now to be a Primatial Pastoral Council chaired by a Primate chosen by the Archbishop of Canterbury which will implement a Pastoral Scheme for a province. In this Scheme there will be appointed a Primatial Vicar who will be delegated some of the powers of the Presiding Bishop and be accountable not to the province's internal structures but to the internationally formed Pastoral Council. This represents a very serious and unprecedented implementation of the requests of the last two Lambeth Conferences that the Primates take up enhanced responsibilities to act in times of crisis including "intervention in cases of exceptional emergency which are incapable of internal resolution within provinces, and giving of guidelines on the limits of Anglican diversity in submission to the sovereign authority of Holy Scripture and in loyalty to our Anglican tradition and formularies" (Lambeth 1998, III.6).

The question of refusing to receive communion together is clearly a contentious and painful one. I really do not think it was a political point not to attend and that, as you acknowledge, it will have caused the Primates who were absent much pain. Perhaps I can say something of my own personal experience here. You may know I came to the 10th anniversary service of Changing Attitude last year which Gene Robinson attended and after which he spoke. I have to confess I went unclear and wrestling in my own mind as to whether or not I would be able to receive communion, well aware that many of my friends certainly would not. I honestly did not know as I entered whether or not I would be able to do so in good conscience but through the service became strongly convinced that - despite the fact that most of those gathered there were working for and celebrating something in the church I opposed and that situations would arise in which I might talk about at least 'impaired' communion with them - I should receive. For all our differences we were brothers and sisters in Christ and it was the Lord's table to which we were all called as saved sinners. In the service I found particularly powerful and moving - given he was my personal tutor at Cranmer and I always loved it when we sang it in chapel - the congregational singing of Michael Vasey's version of A Song of Anselm with those beautiful words, 'Lord Jesus, in your mercy heal us, in your love and tenderness remake us'. Words that must have spoken in different ways to all those there and I felt powerfully spoke to us as a divided church in these painful times. My own view is therefore more in line with those Global South Primates who, despite their differences, shared in communion but I fully understand why some - especially those who head and represent provinces that have officially broken communion - felt they could not do this.

So, overall, I think Tanzania actually represents something very significant indeed for the life of the Communion and that 'everything has changed' not primarily because of what did not happen but because of what did.

There's so much I'd love to respond to in your letter but I want to try and address what I sensed was its most heart-felt plea about the listening process becoming a 'banging my head against a wall process'. It's a feeling I sometimes have (eg I've yet to see any sustained response to the attempt to engage in dialogue that I and others offered back in 2003 with *True Union in the Body?*) and I know many others who share my view also feel this. It does raise major questions of what this 'listening' is all about and whether it has a particular agenda or requires certain agreed presuppositions or outcomes. The problem is that it seems to me that to participate together in 'working out a theology of relationships which is

widely applicable' - if it means acceptance of sexual relationships outside marriage - is simply to ask me to abandon my premises. It is, if you like, to call on me to jump across the street to stand on your tall building! It would be like me insisting that if you were serious about listening then we would only talk about patterns of non-sexual friendship that may be able to offer a vision of redemption for gay and lesbian Christians. Not sure how we get round that but hope we can try to find a way.

The blockage that you see in the process is that I've not been able to acknowledge that there may be potential that your view might have validity. I may come back to that in a later letter as I often do follow through the thought-experiment, 'what would I need to be persuaded of in order to accept either the validity or the truth of others' views in this area?'. You say that I need to recognise 'that alternative views may be held with integrity' such that those who think like you 'need not automatically be expelled from the Communion'. So the crunch question to me - 'are you prepared to allow the potential for a diversity of views on this subject within full members of the Communion?'

Well, with a deep breath and quite a lot of trepidation, I want to try and wrestle with my own reactions and response to this, aware that it is something where my own thinking - and even more, my feelings - are in flux and I sometimes am more 'hard-line' and sometimes 'softer'.

On the softer line I don't think people should be 'expelled from the Communion' for holding certain views. We have a listening process and ongoing discussion quite simply because this is to some degree a contested issue and I have to acknowledge that I may be wrong rather than expelling those who think that I am wrong. Similarly, in one sense there will rightly and inevitably be 'a diversity of views on this subject' - I often don't fully agree with the Archbishop of Nigeria for example! - and the question is the extent of this diversity.

I also think that there are strengths and insights coming from the different perspectives that exist on this subject. That is partly why I don't want us to close the debate down or simply go our separate ways. Although not agreeing with it all, I found Sam Wells' piece on this that I discovered recently online (though on looking again it has sadly been taken down) helpful and challenging.

However, I do find it very hard - almost impossible if I am honest - to accept as a valid and genuinely Christian viewpoint the belief that a sexually active relationship outside marriage (and hence such a relationship between two people of the same sex) is a way of holiness and faithful Christian discipleship that the Church should commend and bless.

In many ways I wish that wasn't the case - life in the church and the church's engagement with British society would in many ways be made much easier if that was not my conviction and that of so many others. And I know many genuine Christians hold that view and others don't hold it but still see it as a genuinely Christian view. But it does seem to me that this is something which - as Archbishop Rowan put it the other day - is 'not mine to give away'. I believe that this is the case in the light not just of Scripture but also tradition and reason.

In the current situation a problem that is at least as serious for me is the way in which some have sought to give away what I think we cannot give away. On women's ordination the Communion first determined - twenty years after saying it would be wrong to proceed - that "the theological arguments as at present presented for and against the ordination of women to the priesthood are inconclusive" (1968 Resolution 34) and that "before any national or regional Church or province makes a final decision to ordain women to the priesthood, the advice of the Anglican Consultative Council (or Lambeth Consultative Body) be sought and carefully considered" (1968 Resolution 37). That is what then happened in terms of process and at ACC1 in 1971 by the narrowest of margins (24-22) it was agreed that "In reply to the request of the Council of the Church of South-East Asia, this Council advises the Bishop of Hong Kong, acting with the approval of his Synod, and any other bishop of the Anglican Communion acting with the approval of his Province, that, if he decides to ordain women to the priesthood, his action will be acceptable to this Council; and that this Council will use its good offices to encourage all Provinces of the Anglican Communion to continue in communion with these dioceses."

Difficult though it has been, the Communion has not torn itself apart over this in the way it has over same-sex unions and of course most provinces now ordain women as priests. We may, I have to admit, eventually find the same happens over same-sex unions but I think that much less likely. If it is to happen, the first step must again be that the Communion as a whole has to judge the theological arguments on either side as 'inconclusive' and then work out what it might ask of provinces that wish to proceed down a new path. It cannot simply say 'there is a minority, perhaps amounting to a majority in one or two provinces, who are not convinced by the current position and so we as a Communion need to abandon our theological convictions and avoid taking a position on this.'

Even more seriously, we don't even know what the other 'side' is here. There is no consensus among those unhappy with the current situation as to what the alternative is - hence your desire for me to participate in finding a consensus on 'a theology of relationship'. It was relatively simple to decide on the weight of theological arguments when it was agreed the question was 'can we move to include women in the ordained presbyterate?' but the question here is not - as far as I can see - simply 'can we move to include same-sex couples within Christian marriage?'. There is no simple consensus on an alternative to the current teaching and practice and even TEC has no pattern of holy life for same-sex couples that it has agreed to be fitting for Christians and for which it has presented a clear theological rationale.

In this context, while I personally can live and want to live in the same church and Communion as you while we disagree and you hold and express the views that you do and seek to convince me and others that you are right and I am wrong, I do not believe it right for the church to abandon its agreed teaching and practice by allowing clergy who disagree to act contrary to these. Similarly - to take another contentious example - I object when I hear of some evangelicals who not only believe in lay presidency at the Eucharist and seek to change the church's mind on this but then practice it in defiance of church teaching (even though the biblical basis for such a restrictive practice is non-existent!). The point could be made in relation to 're-baptism' of those baptised as infants or a whole host of other issues. Here - as on the same-sex relationships issue - Anglicans have a well-established position in

terms of teaching and practice which is shared with the wider church. Those who serve as ministers know that this is the case when they make their ordination vows (even if they don't personally agree) and they do not have authority to overturn it unilaterally in their own ministries. They can argue for change but if they go further and act against the church's teaching - perhaps claiming to have theological integrity and to be a minority that must be embraced within the breadth of Anglican diversity which has never had uniformity of belief - then they cannot object when the church as a whole calls them to account and warns of consequences if they persist. That is, I believe, part of what it means to be bound together in the body of Christ. And what applies for individual clergy I think applies also to individual provinces within the Communion and wider catholic church. Hence I was encouraged when the Sub-Group Report unveiled at Tanzania acknowledged "We do not see how bishops who continue to act in a way which diverges from the common life of the Communion can be fully incorporated into its ongoing life."

You ask the key question carefully in terms of 'are you prepared to allow the potential for a diversity...' and here is where I feel the pressure most acutely. What if the Communion decided this was indeed a matter of indifference, *adiaphora*? Or what if it went further and held that indeed here is where God is doing a new thing and the church should embrace the progressive 'full inclusion' theology as its official teaching and practice? What would I do then?

I would, I think, have to take even more seriously than I do now the possibility that I am simply wrong because I do believe in the work of the Spirit in the church and that the church has in the past misunderstood God's will and misread Scripture. If the church as a whole really did say this was a matter where different and incompatible Christian visions were acceptable I would need to think very carefully about how sure I was that Scripture says what I think it says. However, I also know that the church can be led astray by the spirit of the age and as an heir of the Reformation am quite clear that, as we've said in earlier letters, councils do err and ultimately the Word of God is the church's ruling norm. While one can never tell what one would think and do in such hypothetical situations - hence my drawing back from saying 'absolutely impossible' - I think then a split would probably become inevitable.

Of course all that is based on a situation far from the current reality and, even though it may ultimately lead me to face that difficult situation of being in a minority, I don't want to close down all debate and discussion and treat I.10 as written in stone and without error. My hope and prayer is that in our current situation we can indeed 'find a way forward together'. I think the path taken consistently from Lambeth 98 through Lambeth 03 Primates and Windsor and Dromantine and ACC in 05 and now Tanzania in 07 all make clear what that means in practice - that's why 'nothing has changed'. And I hope and pray that TEC will accept that path, hard though it will be, and not walk apart and that in the Church of England we will also more consistently live within those boundaries as we continue to discuss and debate these issues, led by the Spirit, as we seek the mind of Christ and share the love of Christ together.

With thanks for our ongoing conversation and deepening friendship and fellowship in Christ,
Andrew

Goddard2Goddard letter 9: Giles to Andrew (25th Mar 2007)

Dear Andrew,

Thanks for yours dated 27th February. I'm sorry for the delay in replying – partly because events have been moving so fast that it's been hard to find the right moment! Since your last letter we have had the General Synod debates on the private members motions regarding the listening process and civil partnerships; and, of course, the Episcopalian bishops have given their initial response to the Dar Es Salaam communiqué. We have also met and had an in depth conversation about these issues.

But I think it's more important to respond to your last letter, which was, in turn, responding to mine dated 25th February. In that letter I ask you the question "are you prepared to allow the potential for a diversity of views on this subject within the Anglican Communion." I take your answer to be, with great sensitivity and tact, "no." In that context you draw parallels with the process towards agreeing the possibility that women may be ordained which took place in 1968/72 following a twenty-year moratorium, and also with issues around lay presidency.

It is increasingly clear to me that the process which the Communion has followed over lesbian and gay Christians has been very seriously flawed. In the question over the ordination of women, twenty years led to a conditional acceptance, following a great deal of work by the Communion and a serious and sustained engagement with the question. In contrast, the initial Lambeth resolution in 1978 calling for sustained engagement over issues of homosexuality was honoured only in the breach – very little work was done to investigate the theology and scriptural basis for a more inclusive position. Twenty years later at Lambeth 98, the conclusions of the working party specifically charged with coming up with a response to these questions were hijacked by a few conservative bishops with the support of the then Archbishop of Canterbury, and a resolution was produced which actually rowed back from the 1978 position. In other words, the "conservative" position became a "regressive" position.

In this context, the frustration felt by the Episcopal Church and expressed by its Bishops last week is entirely understandable. To add weight to that frustration, the "listening process" which was called for by Lambeth 98 and followed up in the Windsor Report has patently not been carried out with any degree of seriousness by those people who have most to lose by genuine engagement – that is, those parts of TEC loosely grouped under the American Anglican Council, the Province of Nigeria and conservative groups in England. And the cross-border incursions condemned by Windsor have, far from coming to a halt, merely increased.

In the meantime, the Church of England has moved on. We were both present at General Synod on Feb 28th. I am aware that the final motions did not please either those of us who support an inclusive church or those who wish to turn back the clock. But it is very clear that the tone and substance of both debates reflected a desire by Synod to take a more mature and supportive approach to Christians who genuinely see the inclusion of lesbian and gay people as a Gospel imperative.

In the meantime, the Archbishop of Nigeria is proceeding helter skelter with his support for the homophobic legislation proposed in that country which breaches the UN Declaration on Human Rights.

All these things are of a piece, and in many ways they are comparable and have a continuity with your response to my question.

You say in your letter that you are awaiting a sustained response to the issues raised in 2003 in "True Union in the Body". My answer to that is that the work has been done, over and over again, by a large number of theologians. The methods and conclusions may be different, but the existence of differing positions on these issues, carefully argued and theologically sustainable, can hardly be in doubt. I also came away from our discussion with a distinct impression that you still perceive gay and lesbian people as being in some way intrinsically different from heterosexual people – that difference being expressed through the emphasis in the four areas you mentioned it might be helpful to look at: "sexual desire, sexual behaviour, sexual identity and sexual relationships."

I was, at the time, surprised that you saw the four areas needing clarification as being all to do with sex. I think I now understand why that is.

The literature and discussions by conservative Christians about lesbian and gay people seems to focus almost exclusively on sex. The word "love" is hardly ever heard, either in the work by the House of Bishops (for example, "Some Issues in Human Sexuality") or by those who hold a more conservative position. I am reminded of the Roman Catholic position which, as you are aware, describes homosexuality (a word I no longer use) as an "intrinsic moral disorder."

I think that is because, if you were to acknowledge the reality of the potential for love between two people of the same gender, you would have to acknowledge that lesbian and gay people are a legitimate part of God's creation. You would, in other words, have to realise that lesbian and gay people are equal before God, created as part of God's purpose and part of the astonishing and wonderful diversity of the world we inhabit. And then, the fear is, the whole carefully constructed house of cards would collapse. "Equality of souls before God" says Nietzsche. "Christian dynamite." He's right. The really sad thing is that inclusive Christianity is about celebrating the radically welcoming gospel of Jesus Christ – but the opposition to inclusive Christianity has ended up undermining it.

I think too that conservative Christians have been part of a failure of compassion which will in years to come be seen as surprising as the support of the church for slavery before, eventually, Wilberforce convinced the bishops to change their minds.

Lesbian and gay people, from the earliest recognition that we may be destined to love people of our own gender, until very recently spent our entire formative years expecting to be rejected by God, our families, our friends and our communities. The welcome we find is, often, from those who understand us; and the society we live in is, therefore, often a society defined by sex. True. But this, as a function of the discrimination we have experienced, is

entirely unremarkable; and as the differences between lesbian and gay people and the rest of society are reduced, I am sure that the emphasis on sexual expression will also reduce.

In this context I came across another quote the other day, which I haven't been able to source: "The Bible contains 6 admonitions to homosexuals and 362 admonitions to heterosexuals. That doesn't mean that God doesn't love heterosexuals. It's just that they need more supervision." (Lynn Lavner)

That's why the opposition of some of the Bishops and others to the SORP regulations was so wrong; because by opposing them they were supporting the continued marginalisation of lesbian and gay people in the name of a particular version of religious faith which is neither universal nor, in the end, justifiable.

The apparent inability of conservatives to recognise the reality of God's love in lesbian and gay relationships has, at heart, undermined the whole process in which the Anglican Communion is involved. The "listening process", such as it is, has been approached from a position which a priori denies the possibility of the full inclusion of all in God's realm. Is it any wonder that the process has, through no fault of the Anglican Communion Office, failed? Similarly the genesis and manifestation of Lambeth 1.10 as a means to resist inclusive theology has undermined the nature and status of the Lambeth Conference, and by extension the role of Primates and Bishops within the Communion.

It's a fine mess we're in. To some extent, that may be considered a success by those, mainly in America, who have seen this issue as the one on which they could reclaim Anglicanism for a version of Christianity closer to Puritanism than anything else. But I think you and I would be united in thinking how sad it is that we have come to this.

We are all responsible. But in the end, those who consistently refuse to recognise God's love at work in this diverse world must bear the major burden of responsibility.

It is difficult for me to see where our correspondence might go. I entered it in the hope that we would be able to recognise and understand more fully each others' positions and, perhaps, find common ground. I am glad that in many ways we have found common ground and I am glad that we have got to know one another a little.

But on the issue in question, our correspondence has led me to a recognition that the misunderstanding of the nature and being of lesbian and gay people is so profound that I am not clear how we can, usefully, continue to discuss it. I'm left not with the Bible but with another speech – from the Merchant of Venice – which has been running through my head while I've been thinking about how to respond to your last letter:

"I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions, fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed?"

Yours in Christ, Giles

Goddard2Goddard letter 10: Andrew to Giles (16th Sept 2007)

16 September 2007

Dear Giles,

When we headed this correspondence 'Waiting for Goddards' I never imagined I would leave you waiting six months for a reply and I am really sorry that only now are you getting a response to your letter of 25th March. As you know from personal conversations we've had this is not because of any offence taken or because I thought our correspondence had ended but simply due to other major pressures I've been under. I jotted down notes on your piece almost immediately but never got round to putting them together in a letter. Then I lost them and so I did the exercise again in early summer. I then found the originals but again lacked necessary time and energy to draw things together. I was delighted when you were in touch in early August to ask about starting up the conversation again but sadly I could not get a letter written to you in the few days before going on holiday. A further attempt to get going at the end of August also ran aground as other things took over and so I've decided to start again from scratch.

Although there is much I could say - especially now I've found two sets of notes! - in response to your letter (can you remember what you said?) I now think it best to put all that on one side (hopefully not for ever - I am particularly interested in exploring more the crucial question of whether or not and in what ways my 'misunderstanding of the nature and being of lesbian and gay people is so profound' that you are 'not clear how we can, usefully, continue to discuss' the issue of homosexuality). Instead of picking up that conversation now I thought I'd write about the coming weeks in the light of all the developments since we last wrote to each other: Lambeth (non-) invitations, responses to draft covenant, new bishops in US etc.

We've both I guess got used to imminent events in the Communion being described as crucial, decisive, historic etc from General Convention 2003 through Lambeth Emergency Primates' Meeting and Gene Robinson's consecration to the publication of the Windsor Report and then the ongoing Windsor Process including the Dromantine Primates' Meeting, the Nottingham ACC, General Convention 2006, Tanzania Primates' Meeting etc. Each of these has been heralded by many as a watershed, the time for resolution or realignment and each has come and gone and generated its own new set of challenges and further impairments within the life of the Communion. I guess the TEC House of Bishops next week and the September 30th deadline may prove simply another similar crisis that passes without being qualitatively different from these others and yet there are clear signs that indeed things may be at a major crossroads.

For me, the significance and urgency of these next few days and weeks is in part because of the clear and specific, time-limited requests to TEC from the Primates and their warning that "if the reassurances requested of the House of Bishops cannot in good conscience be given, the relationship between The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion as a whole remains damaged at best, and this has consequences for the full participation of the Church in the life of the Communion". With Lambeth now less than a year away if there are indeed

to be 'consequences for...full participation' it is clear the Primates will either have to eat their words or action will have to be taken by the Instruments sooner rather than later.

There is also the rapid rise in interventions within TEC and these now increasingly in the form not of taking parishes for a period under a foreign jurisdiction but of consecrations to the episcopate. When such consecrations began over 7 years ago, the then Archbishop of Canada, (in)famously remarked, "Bishops are not intercontinental ballistic missiles, manufactured on one continent and fired into another as an act of aggression". There now looks dangerously like an episcopal equivalent of an arms race developing as Nigeria (having followed Rwanda in establishing a US mission wing with its own bishop in Martyn Minns) have announced four more bishops (despite CANA having only 60 congregations and 80 clergy requiring oversight), Rwanda another 3 AMiA bishops, while Kenya and Uganda have recently joined in and elected and already consecrated new suffragan bishops to serve American parishes under their province's jurisdiction. Linked together under Common Cause and meeting as what looks like a potential proto-college of bishops just after TEC's House of Bishops and just before the African provinces of CAPA gather in early October, it now seems TEC's claim to be the sole structural representative of Anglicanism in the US is unsustainable, especially if a number of dioceses shortly seek to remove themselves and become part - as whole dioceses - of another Anglican province. While this is, of course, simply the latest in a long line of defections and breakaways over the last 30 or 40 years, the fact these are fully integrated into other provinces of the Communion and their leadership apparently committed to working together in mission and ministry mean we are now clearly in uncharted waters for the Communion and its unity. These "interventions by some of our number and by bishops of some Provinces, against the explicit recommendations of the Windsor Report, however well-intentioned, have exacerbated this situation" (Primates at Dar) and I wish they had not happened and would now be stopped. However, they will only come to an end and the bishops and congregations somehow reintegrated and made regular within an ordered church if the American bishops next week change course.

My hope and prayer is therefore obviously that TEC's bishops will respond clearly and positively to the request of the Primates. That will require them to reverse their initial rejection of the proposed Pastoral Scheme (which rash rejection, to be honest, played into the hands of those eager for more interventions, certainly in the case of Kenya and Uganda who were happy to work with the Scheme as a means of providing oversight for their American congregations). They will also need clearly to give the assurances sought^[1] as to the effect of the actions of General Convention 2006 (and I don't think they are being asked to unconstitutionally usurp or 'trump' Convention but simply to interpret its ambiguous resolutions and to make commitments clearly within their remit as bishops - episcopal authorisation of rites and consent to elected candidates for the episcopate). Only this will enable the Primates at last to be "in a position to recognise that The Episcopal Church has mended its broken relationships".

Sadly, this outcome looks highly unlikely and so serious thought needs to be given to what happens next. I look forward to hearing how you think the Communion should respond to such an outcome but suspect you will call for a recognition of provincial autonomy and diversity in secondary matters, the need for ongoing respectful dialogue on both sexuality and the nature and structures of life in communion (especially as regards the proposed

covenant), and the importance of Lambeth 2008 as a place where such dialogue can take place and bonds of affection be strengthened. As I write that - please forgive me for putting the words into your mouth and correct me where I am wrong! - I realise that stated in those general terms and abstracted from our recent history I could agree. The difficulty is that, as with the majority of the Communion, I don't at present see these as areas of legitimate diversity. I also honestly believe that if the dialogue and Lambeth conference we so urgently need is to be in the context of trust that will enable conversations to flourish and move everyone on from the current impasse then the American church must take the steps called for in the Windsor Report and reaffirmed consistently by all the Instruments of Communion.

What then do I think should happen if TEC fails to respond adequately? In one sense of course that is of little importance. TEC is responding to the Primates who in turn are simply following the mind of the Communion as expressed in TWR and its reception. It is, therefore, vital for the Primates as a body to determine - or at least be integrally involved in the determination of - the Communion's response. The Dar communiqué clearly stated that "the Primates request that the answer of the House of Bishops is conveyed to the Primates by the Presiding Bishop by 30th September 2007". Unless and until the Primates themselves act or establish some other authority to adjudicate and respond, I cannot see how any authoritative Communion response is possible. The danger of course is that the longer it takes to frame a response the more likely it is that provinces or groups of provinces will fill the vacuum and offer their own responses. My hope is therefore that any conclusion reached by the Joint Standing Committee meeting after the TEC House of Bishops is purely advisory and considered by the Primates as a whole either through a full Primates' Meeting or through some other form of consultation such as regional gatherings of Primates meeting to talk and pray and then communicate their deliberations to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The focus of any decision in response to TEC was also clearly stated in Dar - "consequences for the full participation of the Church in the life of the Communion" - and that must now relate to invitations to the Lambeth Conference. I personally think it of vital importance that Archbishop Rowan's letter with the original invitations included two key phrases (*italics added below*):

- "I have said, and repeat here, that coming to the Conference does not commit you to accepting every position held by other bishops as equally legitimate or true. But I hope it does commit us all to striving together for a more effective and coherent worldwide body, working for God's glory and Christ's Kingdom. The Instruments of Communion have offered for this purpose a set of resources and processes, focused on the Windsor Report and the Covenant proposals. My hope is that as we gather *we can trust that your acceptance of the invitation carries a willingness to work with these tools to shape our future*. I urge you all most strongly to strive during the intervening period to strengthen confidence and understanding between our provinces and not to undermine it"
- "At this point, and with the recommendations of the Windsor Report particularly in mind, I have to reserve the right to withhold *or withdraw* invitations from bishops whose appointment, actions or manner of life have caused exceptionally serious division or scandal within the Communion"

An inadequate or negative response to the Primates from the TEC House of Bishops must seriously undermine any trust in the wider Communion that the acceptance of invitations from bishops in that province does signal the willingness called for in relation to Windsor. Furthermore, the Archbishop of Canterbury is at liberty to consider withdrawing invitations (a scenario I don't recall ever being seriously raised before this letter mentioned it) if it is held that the actions of TEC's bishops have caused exceptionally serious division.

I guess one solution would simply be to determine that the patterns of broken and newly forming bonds of communion between the increasingly fractured US Anglicans and other provinces are now so complex, and the lack of resolve to address this internally within the US so serious, that all bishops ministering in the US must be treated differently from bishops in other provinces. That might mean withdrawal of all invitations, invitations to all but only on more limited terms (eg voice but no vote, only for a part not the whole of the conference), or invitation only to a small group of bishops who could represent the different and conflicting patterns of Anglicanism to the wider Communion. This way forward would have the advantage of containing, to a certain extent, the divisions within American Anglicanism that otherwise threaten to spread across the whole Communion. It would, in effect, put American Anglicanism in a form of quarantine and create a *cordon sanitaire* around the existing province (and any newly formed provincial structures) until the covenant hopefully provided an opportunity and means for renewing mutual recognition, revitalising the bonds of affection, and repairing the tear in the fabric of the Communion.

Another solution would be to recognise that invitations are from the Archbishop to individual bishops and that therefore decisions by or in relation to whole provinces are part of the current problem (as will perhaps become clear if some African provinces try to enforce a boycott on all their bishops). The Archbishop could therefore seek to distinguish somehow between those bishops in America who are genuinely committed to working with the Windsor and covenant process and those who are not and are instead conscientiously convinced they are called to support actions which result in serious division or scandal within the Communion. That differentiation could be effected in various ways, for example, studying any roll-call vote next week among the bishops as they respond to the Primates or eliciting a more explicit personal commitment on the part of bishops to the willingness to work with Windsor spoken of in the initial letter of invitation (perhaps with reference to the Camp Allen principles or the Dar requests).

Of course, any of these 'solutions' is a sign of failure and brokenness and disobedience but I believe that is because each of them seeks to respond as adequately as possible and with some integrity to a situation which is itself palpably one of failure, brokenness and disobedience. We do look as if we are now in the situation where groups of Christians are determinedly and conscientiously convinced that they are being called by God to follow certain paths even though this results in damaging their bonds of communion and causing new levels of division within the body of Christ. I fervently hope these responses are not needed and some other outcome can be found, not least because of the effect of any of these on other parts of the Communion, especially here in the Church of England. Nevertheless, the only alternative I can currently envisage (unless the latest suggestion from Nigeria is taken up and Lambeth 2008 simply postponed) is effectively to say that the repeated and insistent refusal of the American church to heed the mind and appeals of the

Communion since the last Lambeth Conference (in relation to both sexual ethics and the character of life in communion) has, in practice, no consequences for their participation in the life of the Communion. Such a response will likely lead to others parts of the Communion staying away from the Lambeth Conference and so undermining it. More fundamentally, it would amount to abandoning the whole substance, logic and dynamic of the Windsor Report and Process, disregarding the Instruments of Communion, and risking the destruction of any claim of Lambeth 2008 to be an instrument of communion. It would, in other words, likely mark the end of the Anglican Communion as we have known it.

I don't expect you to agree with that bleak analysis but I'd love to know where you think my line of thought is flawed given my commitment to Windsor. I'd especially love to know what alternatives you think there might be that are both consistent with that commitment and more likely to prevent the end of the Communion and enable the greater unity in truth and love for which we all seek and pray.

Of course, if you take as long to reply to this as I've taken to reply to your last, the Lambeth Conference will be just about to happen! Hopefully we can avoid that and return to our more frequent exchanges over the coming weeks and months. Perhaps, if nothing else, they can act as a hopeful sign that whatever happens in relation to the Instruments and structures of the Communion, ongoing conversation and personal commitment to deepening friendship and communion is possible and will continue whatever happens at the global and institutional level.

With all best wishes,

Andrew

Goddard2Goddard letter 11: Giles to Andrew (3rd Nov 2007)

03 November 2007

Dear Andrew

Thanks for yours dated 16th September. I was pleased to receive it and glad that our correspondence has re-opened, especially in view of the other developments in your, Lis and the children's lives for which I am sorry.

However I have to say that I found your letter's contents perplexing. Although you acknowledge that there are outstanding issues from mine dated March 16th, and you suggest returning to them in the future, the purpose of the letter appears to be more to warn TEC of possible consequences if it fails (in your view) to respond appropriately to Dar Es Salaam, and to outline your understanding of ways in which the Communion as a whole might respond. In other words, I'm not absolutely sure how it fits into our correspondence.

In fact what you feared did not come to pass – the House of Bishops did agree to refrain from consecrating Bishops in same-gender relationships and not to authorise the blessing of couples of the same gender. You then issued two pieces, the first rejecting the Statement itself and the second rejecting the report of the Joint Standing Committee.

I have read all these carefully. I have to say that both their tone and the content fills me with a deep sadness. It is increasingly clear to me that the present situation is one which is potentially very damaging to those who maintain the conservative position, and the way in which you, and Fulcrum, have responded to the New Orleans statement is further evidence of this.

Your responses seem to contain a barely suppressed anger at the current situation in which TEC are seen entirely as the culprits. They read in a way which is deeply ungenerous, and I find this surprising because it does not square with my knowledge of you. I suspect that the reason for the lack of generosity and the refusal to recognise the very significant achievement of the TEC Bishops at New Orleans is that a reading of the situation has begun to emerge amongst the conservatives which is distorting the whole discussion.

Until the election of Bishop Jefferts Schori and the increasingly clear resistance to the conservative position among the Primates, things seemed to be going your way. There was a genuine expectation that TEC would be excluded from future discussions, and a real possibility that an "alternative" to TEC might be recognised in the United States. But initiatives such as the "Global Center" and the very clear guidance of the Presiding Bishop, together with the more and more random actions of conservative Primates in Africa and the internal disagreements among conservatives in the United States, have begun to indicate that, in fact, there may be tentative grounds to hope that the Communion may come through this episode in a state which is broadly continuous with the pre Lambeth 1998 situation. In other words, the classical orthodox Anglican gospel of inclusion and welcome will continue.

If my reading is correct – and of course you’ll challenge it – it turns the conservatives from victors into victims. What had previously been seen as a relatively smooth path towards a reassertion of Reformation/neo-Calvinist theology (and I have a great deal of respect for Calvin’s theology and faith) has become something very different. The superficial unity of those who oppose the recognition of love between people of the same gender has not been sufficient to withstand the tendency amongst conservative groups to go their own ways, and we are beginning to see that again here. As I write, the Diocese of Pittsburgh votes to secede, and Bob Duncan compares himself to Martin Luther.

A victim mentality is very different to a victor mentality. Blame and responsibility are ascribed to others, and the actions of the self are often seen as providing their own justification. Thus, a major concern of mine about your responses is their startling one-sidedness. You go, in forensic detail, into the process undertaken by TEC and the JSC, challenging both the method and the validity of their conclusions. But you seem to accept, without question, the validity and status of Lambeth 1.10, the Windsor Report, the Dromantine Communique and the Dar-Es-Salaam Communique – in spite of the fact that the processes involved in each of these were at least as flawed and in many cases far worse than anything which happened in New Orleans or within the Joint Standing Committee.

As an academic, I would expect more even-handedness on your part. Even the slightest acquaintance with Lambeth 1.10 should tell you that the “debate” which led to the final version of the resolution was deeply unedifying and a completely unacceptable basis for any subsequent policy decision. Openly biased chairing by the then Archbishop of Canterbury combined with the tactics of the playground to produce a motion which bore very little resemblance either to the recommendations of the Bishops in the conference working party or previous Lambeth resolutions. If you are in any doubt, it’s worth re-reading the relevant part of Stephen Bates’ book “A Church at War.”

Arising from this fiasco came the Windsor Report, which a small group of conservatives have consistently attempted to turn into a quasi-legal document instead of the consultation document intended.

There was little representation at Dromantine by “inclusive” Christians, but it is very clear that the conservative lobby groups were there in force, influencing and manipulating the agenda at a distance. I’m sure I don’t have to remind you, too, that a large number of Primates absented themselves from Holy Communion.

We were at Dar Es Salaam, and so we have at first hand information about the attempts by Martyn Minns and his associates to set the agenda, and the overt bullying tactics of mainly but not exclusively the Archbishop of Nigeria.

I remind you of this simply to attempt to create some sense of balance in our discussion. Motes and beams, if you like. The TEC and JSC processes may not have been perfect; but the processes leading up to the Dar Es Salaam statement to which they responded were very far from perfect too. It’s possible to construct a perfectly coherent argument that the last 10 years have been preoccupied with undoing the damage Lambeth 1.10 caused to the Communion.

We are, as Christians, called to love – indiscriminately and generously. Without let or hindrance. Not to say that anything goes, of course; but to seek to recognise Christ in our brothers and sisters.

Your most revealing comment in your letter to me is where you suggest that American Anglicanism might be put “in a form of quarantine [creating] a cordon sanitaire around the existing province”. The more I reflect on the present situation, the more it feels as though a pathology has developed within the Communion which has corrupted our dealings across the body of our churches. You warn on several occasions of the dangers of a “hermeneutic of suspicion” , and yet your entire position is one of deep suspicion of the motives and faith of the members of TEC. Your reference to “quarantining” TEC indicates that you see the welcome offered by them to lesbian and gay people as a sort of sickness which is in danger of infecting the Communion at large

I’m sure you’ve read the work of Walter Wink – most notably his “Powers” trilogy. You’ll know that among the many extremely thought-provoking ideas within his work, a major strand is the idea that an institution or an individual can become bent out of shape; a Domination System can emerge which enables the power of evil to confront the mystery of God. I wonder if the conservative faction in the present discussion doesn’t have, somewhere within its present response, the notion that the “revisionists” are motivated by such a power. But it is equally possible to say that the debate at Lambeth 98 was just such an attempt to create a Domination System; Resolution 1.10 created an access point which bent the body of the Communion out of shape, and a very great deal of the subsequent story of the Communion has been a result of something which neither reflected nor respected Anglican faith, polity or the Gospel. I refer you to Dr Joe Cassidy’s article [“Humility, Grace and Freedom”](#) in which he asks the question - where is grace in the current debate?

The main reason I initiated this correspondence was in the hope that we would, somehow, be able to find a mutual understanding of one another’s faith and personhood, under God and in Christ Jesus. My reading and reflection over the summer – especially Miroslav Volf’s book “Exclusion and Embrace” but also my reflections on the life of this parish, St Peter’s Walworth – has driven home to me more and more strongly how essential it is that those of us who think so differently on the subject of human sexuality recognise and affirm the bonds of affection to which we are called.

But this is a huge challenge, and I suspect in the end that the challenge is greater for you than it is for me. Because I have a good understanding of your position, of how you reach it and why you hold it with such passion. I have spent time as a conservative evangelical. My faith is firmly rooted in Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected. I have a great deal of respect for evangelical theology and faith; the tragedy, for me, is that it has become so bound up with a particular understanding of human sexuality and relationships.

Re-reading our previous letters, I am struck very strongly by the fact that in spite of the thousands of words which have passed between us, our letters seem in many ways like an extended school debate. For me it has been important that, in the words of my letter

dated 25th February, you are “prepared to allow the potential for a diversity of views on this subject [relationships between people of the same gender] within full members of the Communion” ; the constant theme in your letters has been a restatement of the conservative position and an expression of concern about how someone with my views may be enabled to continue to be a part of a Communion which should, if I understand you correctly, have no serious potential for a new understanding of the place of human sexuality in Christian faith and life - hence your support for a Covenant.

Frankly, that hasn't got us very far. But I think it's symptomatic of the wider debate, which has now become so destructive. Because as yet, I think we have been unable to have the grace to seek to learn from one another. The “listening process” is not well under way: it has scarcely begun, between you and me and between conservative and inclusive Christians. That's why we need Lambeth 2008, and that's why the Joint Standing Committee was right to call for a period of reflection. As long as this controversy is seen as a debate, there will be a perception of victory and a perception of victimhood, and both of those contain grave spiritual dangers.

So as our correspondence recommences, I'm very deliberately challenging you to try to take yourself out of the theological position in which you're so firmly rooted and seek genuinely to understand the Christian integrity of my faith and life. Which is very far from perfect... but that's the same for everyone!

I'm sure you know the work of Andrew Walls – especially his essay [“The Ephesian Moment.”](#) In it he draws parallels between the situation facing the Ephesians and the situation facing twenty first century Christians. Although he's writing mainly about culturally diverse understandings of the Gospel, the essay is entirely applicable to this discussion. Three paragraphs leapt out at me as I read it:

But in our own day the Ephesian moment has come again, and come in a richer mode than has ever happened since the first century. Developments over several centuries, reaching a climax in the twentieth, mean that we no longer have two, but innumerable, major cultures in the church. Like the old Jerusalem Christians, Western Christians had long grown used to the idea that they were guardians of a "standard" Christianity; also like them, they find themselves in the presence of new expressions of Christianity, and new Christian lifestyles that have developed or are developing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to display Christ under the conditions of African, Indian, Chinese, Korean, and Latin American life. And most of the world's Christians are now Africans, Asians, or Latin Americans.

There are two dangers. One lies in an instinctive desire to protect our own version of Christian faith, or even to seek to establish it as the standard, normative one. The other, and perhaps the more seductive in the present condition of Western Christianity, is the postmodern option: to decide that each of the expressions and versions is equally valid and authentic, and that we are therefore each at a liberty to enjoy our own in isolation from all the others.

Neither of these approaches is the Ephesian way. The Ephesian metaphors of the

temple and of the body show each of the culture-specific segments as necessary to the body but as incomplete in itself. Only in Christ does completion, fullness, dwell. And Christ's completion as we have seen, comes from all humanity, from the translation of the life of Jesus into the lifeways of all the world's cultures and subcultures through history. None of us can reach Christ's completeness on our own. We need each other's vision to correct, enlarge, and focus our own; only together are we complete in Christ.

It seems to me that the Communion is, in spite of everything, moving towards "some new consensus" which will involve a recognition that uniformity of thought on these issues is neither possible nor desirable – and, I hope, the acknowledgement that "we need each other's vision to correct, enlarge and focus our own." To some extent, that's what TEC's begun to model, which may be one reason why the New Orleans statement was so roundly rejected by conservatives. And it's happening in the UK too. The Anglican churches of Scotland and Wales are far ahead of the Church of England in the acceptance of difference, but even in England, I was glad to be at the Woolwich Episcopal Area clergy conference alongside the widest range of theological positions. Although, sadly, a few absented themselves from it, it was a conference marked by generosity and common purpose.

I certainly do not have a postmodern view that each version of Christianity is equally authentic; my question to you is whether you have an instinctive desire to protect your own version of Christian faith, or whether we can jointly seek Christ's fullness in the Body of Christ, the Church?

The question for both of us is, how do we find Christ in our fellow Christians?

Sincerely

Giles

[Goddard2Goddard letter 12: Andrew to Giles \(12th Nov 2007\)](#)

12th November 2007

Dear Giles,

Thanks for your letter and sorry my decision to focus on the pressing Communion issues in mid-Sept was 'perplexing' and left you 'not absolutely sure how it fits into our correspondence'. It is interesting that discussing these political issues seems so fruitless. If I'm totally honest I have to confess I was left confused and rather alarmed at what you'd heard me saying and wondered whether we're in danger of experiencing parallel universes.

I'm grateful you spent so long ploughing through my two recent pieces on TEC and JSC even though you liked neither their tone nor their content. The fact Gene Robinson agreed with my main critique of JSC - in relation to its understanding of what TEC had said about blessing same-sex unions - must though surely mean that my conclusion there does not arise from my alleged 'deep suspicion of the motives and faith of the members of TEC'? I was particularly concerned you thought I attacked the process as part of my goal was to show that, though not perfect, given the constraints they were working under the JSC processes were nowhere near as flawed as some were claiming.

That question of processes leads to your serious charge of a failure on my part to be even-handed. Here I'll cut most of the details but this really did feel like parallel universes. Of course Lambeth I.10 was not a perfect process (which statement or creed by any church gathering was?) but the weakness of your account is perhaps most evident in your charge of 'openly biased chairing by the then Archbishop of Canterbury'. The debate on sexuality was chaired by Robin Eames (as Stephen Bates notes) and he did not experience it as 'deeply unedifying' but said 'we have displayed how we can disagree and still love each other'. George Carey spoke clearly in the debate but so did Robert Runcie in the 1988 debate on women bishops (where I think he spoke early in the debate and in the eyes of many thereby stifled discussion and determined the outcome). George Carey also met before the debate with African leaders and agreed to support the amendment describing homosexual practice as "incompatible with Scripture" but given 1978:10 ("we reaffirm heterosexuality as the scriptural norm") and 1988:34 ("reaffirms the traditional biblical teaching that sexual intercourse is an act of total commitment which belongs properly within a permanent married relationship") I'm not sure why you think this 'bore very little resemblance to previous Lambeth resolutions'. The statement about not advising "the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those in same gender unions" came of course from the conference working party (so how did it bear very little resemblance to their recommendations?).

The parallel worlds continue when you see the Windsor Report as a 'consultation'. Its closing paragraphs so relevant at present do not exactly read as saying 'here are some ideas we've come up with but let's see what everyone makes of them'. Finally, while Dar too was imperfect the fact that at the end of a gruelling few days every one of the Primates present stood and gave assent to the final communiqué was - like the unanimity of the Lambeth Commission - a minor miracle.

We probably have to agree to differ on our readings of recent history but I cannot ignore your interpretation of my 'most revealing' comment about possibly withdrawing the Lambeth invitations to American bishops. This you tell me 'indicates that you see the welcome offered by them to lesbian and gay people as a sort of sickness which is in danger of infecting the Communion at large'. I really don't know where to begin in replying to such a serious misrepresentation. I have no problem with TEC or anyone welcoming lesbian and gay people. The disagreement is about what 'welcome' involves. At no point did I identify the 'sickness'(not a term I used) with that or with the election and consecration of Gene Robinson. The problem I identified was fragmentation, disunity and realignment and the solution was "that all bishops ministering in the US must be treated differently from bishops in other provinces". The current position – all TEC bishops can come except Gene Robinson – appears much more to imply the problem is "lesbian and gay people" and it is interesting that very few 'conservatives' believe it right to focus so exclusively on him. The rationale for suggesting such a drastic response was clearly stated - containing "the divisions within American Anglicanism that otherwise threaten to spread across the whole Communion" – and this idea (which I floated as one option) would have the same 'quarantine' effect on 'conservative' American bishops who oppose Gene Robinson's election and same-sex blessings (both within TEC and in CANA, AMiA etc) as on those supportive of these ways of welcoming gay and lesbian people.

Perhaps our visions of the Communion's future – as of its recent past - are so divergent we need to draw back from this as well and look at other issues, thankful the big decisions are not ours - though we may find we have important and painful decisions to make in the future – and finding unity in praying for Archbishop Rowan and others as they take these decisions. In the meantime let's see what we can do to – in words I wholeheartedly endorse – 'recognise and affirm the bonds of affection to which we are called' as 'those who think so differently on the subject of human sexuality'.

You repeat your appeal of 25th February and ask if I am "prepared to allow the potential for a diversity of views on this subject [relationships between people of the same gender] within full members of the Communion". I tried to answer at some length on 27th February (I won't repeat it here!) but on 25th March you replied, "I take your answer to be, with great sensitivity and tact, "no."". That was one of the things I wanted to pick up in response last time as I'm afraid reducing my answer to 'no' was – given you want the answer 'yes' – rather closes down the conversation. I felt the same in your more recent letter when you said you understand me to say the Communion 'should...have no serious potential for a new understanding of the place of human sexuality in Christian faith and life' (adding 'hence your support for a Covenant', a sign our understandings of the covenant process are probably as incompatible as our readings of recent Communion history).

I'll try to begin to respond to your question in a minute but first –sorry ! – I fear some of your descriptions of my position misrepresent and distort my views so a few clarifications, in the hope these too may open up potential avenues for fruitful discussion.

You described 'conservatives' and I think you included me in the group as 'those who oppose the recognition of love between people of the same gender'. I want to say that I recognise people of the same gender can and do love each other. The question is what

forms of love are Christ-like and godly and what sort of recognition the church as a whole can and should offer. I think it is also important to ask how these other forms of love relate and compare to marital love – love between a man and a woman who make an exclusive, lifelong commitment of love and sexual faithfulness to one another. The same questions apply to others eg love between people of opposite genders where both are unmarried or where one or both are married to someone else or love between an adult and an adolescent. Nobody is going to doubt that forms of love can and do exist in such relationships but the question is what shape love must take to reflect God’s love and to respect the significance of marital love which is given by God as a sign of his own covenantal love. There are also more specific question when love is expressed physically in a sexual relationship. Should the church teach this form of expression of love is wrong in all these relationships? Can it accept there are structures of relationship where (even if it still wishes to give moral teaching about proper sexual conduct) it does not ask questions about sexual behaviour just as it tends not to ask married couples about their sex lives?

On the question of “recognition” you will have seen in my piece on New Orleans that I objected to TEC’s appeal to True Union in the Body? and JSC clearly agree with me that public rites are not acceptable in the Communion. The question then becomes whether more consensus can be found on what forms of private pastoral care are appropriate rather than the highly-charged question of liturgical blessings or “marriages”. I wonder if some of these issues might be worth us exploring further?

So, back to your question and why (rather bluntly) I disliked my answer being reduced to ‘no’ (and, incidentally, found more to agree with than I expected in Joe Cassidy’s stimulating article which I’d not seen until you pointed it out).

- I believe my own views have developed over the years and they will, I trust, develop further as I study Scripture, dialogue with fellow Christians and seek to be led by the Spirit.
- I recognise there are genuine Christians who sincerely hold incompatible and opposing views.
- I have no desire to deny the genuine Christian faith and virtues of many Christians in loving same-sex relationships or to deny that Christ is at work and evident in their lives. To do so would be to bear false witness - one of the positive features following recent ‘other developments’ in my life has been the many words of Christian encouragement and concrete, often costly, offers of help and support I’ve received from gay and lesbian Christians I’ve got to know in recent years demonstrating that ‘bonds of affection’ can indeed be affirmed across this divide.
- I’m committed to the listening process because I believe the Communion needs a proper, corporate, considered means of exploring together what new understandings of the place of human sexuality it may need to develop.

In the light of that – and with apologies for such long quotations - my own view is summed up by Oliver O’Donovan in his “Reading the St Andrew’s Day Statement” which may help our conversation:

The faithful homosexual Christian, however, is in a situation which the church cannot recognise as one of "two forms or vocations" within which a life of faithful witness in chastity and holiness can be lived. As it stands, the claim that there are two and only two such forms, though well supported, as the authors think, from Scripture, is not directly a biblical one but claims the authority of unbroken church tradition. If that tradition were shown to be essentially defective (i.e. without the supposed support of Scripture) or (less implausibly) to be more accommodating than has been thought (e.g. including homosexual unions as a valid variant of marriage), then, of course, there would be no general difficulty. But that supposes a radical development in the church's understanding of the tradition. The Statement does not rule such a development out a priori; in principle, no Anglican who believed, as Anglicans are supposed to believe, in the corrigibility of tradition could rule it out a priori. Yet the authors do not entertain the suggestion that such a development is in train or can be anticipated, and so they conclude: "there is no place for the church to confer legitimacy upon alternatives", i.e. to marriage and singleness. This phrase has been read as saying rather more than it does. It is the conferral of legitimacy, i.e. by implication some kind of ceremonial endorsement, which it rules out. Relationships may have moral integrity in varying degrees without the church's formal authorisation. The integrity that is claimed for some homosexual unions does not depend on any ceremony. Indeed, when, in the ordinary course of events, the church solemnizes a marriage, it is not purporting to pronounce on the moral quality of the relationship involved. It is shaping the expectations of the community and conferring evangelical authorisation on the form which the relationship takes. Something similar can be said about vows of celibacy. It is this formal function which the authors think inappropriate in the case of a homosexual partnership, given the church's understanding of the two alternative vocations. Yet the church member in this generally irregular situation is to be "assisted" and "encouraged" in discipleship; in any personal counsel that is offered, due weight is to be given to "the circumstances which make each individual case different from every other". This is the "flexibility" which the Statement claims for personal practice. It means the freedom to begin from the needs of this person in this situation, and from what the Holy Spirit is saying to him or her at this point. And it means being able to treat different people differently, responding to their different capabilities, receptivities, patterns of responsibility and obligation, curves of moral and spiritual development.

After drawing an analogy with Christian capitalists and how the church believed it gained 'new understanding' in relation to money, interest and economics he continues:

Can we imagine something similar happening in the realm of sexual ethics? Well, a development of the tradition cannot take place just by announcing that it is going to. It is the result of a deepening understanding on the part of the whole church, the outcome of serious and prolonged engagement with theoretical questions, practical problems and successful and unsuccessful experiments. It is not simply a matter of Bishops or Synods deciding that they will change their line. On the other hand authentic developments cannot be ruled out; and we can learn to conduct our dialogue in such a way that, if and as new understanding does offer itself, we will be open to it. Borrowing a phrase from *Issues in Human Sexuality*, the Statement speaks

of "respecting the integrity" of members of the church who "conscientiously dissent" (i.e. reflectively and with careful thought) from the church's teaching. That is to say, the church can recognise the seriousness of the stance these members are taking, want to engage equally seriously with them, acknowledge that such an engagement may have the long-term effect of developing the tradition of church-understanding (though nobody is in a position to say how and to what extent), all without thinking that its advocacy of the traditional view is, as such, mistaken.

I would say 'Amen' to that, which is in large part what I think our conversation is about. I am therefore unclear why you took my answer to be 'no' or what more you are asking of me for it to become 'yes'. Let me try out some options, again apologies that these may sound rather blunt but they are asked genuinely and in friendship to explore where we are, not antagonistically:

- Do I have to reject the conclusion of most of the Communion that the TEC experiment has been an 'unsuccessful' one and instead allow it to proceed as providing a way of gaining 'new understanding' and 'authentic development'?
- Must I accept that it is alright for a diocese or province to proceed with little or no dialogue with the rest of the church to give public recognition and blessing to relationships which most fellow Christians today (never mind for 2,000 years – though Walls' comments about Christians being 'necessarily ancestor-conscious, aware of the previous generations of faith' are important) believe to be wrong?
- Must I do this despite the fact that the moral disciplines of these relationships of love between people of the same gender have never been clearly stated and agreed even within those local churches taking this path?
- Have I to accept confusion about this area being brought into the wider life and mission of the Communion by acknowledging TEC was within its rights to consecrate as a bishop someone who - because he concluded in good conscience after prayer and counsel that he best expressed love with someone of the same gender - ended his marriage and subsequently began a loving relationship with another man?

I fear that if the answer to these questions is 'yes' then what is being asked of people like me is such that it becomes almost impossible for us as a Communion to 'jointly seek Christ's fullness in the Body of Christ, the Church'. To accept those terms would further damage relationships with parts of the Church from which we are currently divided and would miss our 'Ephesian Moment' by imposing a Western, liberal (politically as much as theologically) mindset as 'the standard, normative one' (Walls). It would mean severely damaging, perhaps even severing, our historic ties with those Anglicans who live out and share the gospel in parts of the world where (as Walls again reminds us) 'most of the world's Christians' are to be found and who confirm within Anglicanism that 'Christianity will be mainly the religion of rather poor and very poor peoples, with few gifts to bring except the gospel itself'.

Walls concludes his piece (which I didn't know was online so thanks for the URL!) with words that though he intends them in a different way perhaps also speak to our current crisis in the Communion:

A developed world in which Christians become less prominent will seek to protect its position against the rest. The Ephesian question at the Ephesian moment is whether or not the church in all its diversity will demonstrate its unity by the interactive participation of all its culture-specific segments, the interactive participation that is to be expected in a functioning body. Will the body of Christ be realized or fractured in this new Ephesian moment?....the United States...may be crucial for the answer that will be given to it.

So I hope that you're not asking me for 'more' in any of the forms I outlined and that this second attempt to answer your question does not sound like another 'no' but will enable us to pick up some of these subjects about loving same-sex relationships in future letters.

Sorry this letter has gone on for so long – at least it's not as long as the HoB and JSC pieces! To end more personally, thanks for your kind words about our current situation, congratulations on being 'canonised' the other week and I hope Drenched in Grace goes well. Following the Joe Cassidy link you gave I was interested to see the developments to the Inclusive Church site and have subscribed to the newsletter to keep informed of its growing work.

Look forward to hearing from you and praying for God's blessing on you and your ministry.

All the best,

Andrew.

Goddard2Goddard letter 13: Giles to Andrew (2nd December 2007)

2 December 2007

Dear Andrew,

Very many thanks for yours dated 6 November, and for your good wishes on my installation as Canon (a wonderful event!). When I was training for ordination we were taught something about group dynamics, and one model of interaction offered to us was the "Forming, Norming, Storming and Performing" approach in which successful groups often unconsciously engage. I think it can be applied to one-to-one situations too, and thanks to your generosity of response I'm hopeful we can move into a "performing" stage in this correspondence.

I was very interested in your idea that we might be living in parallel universes. I'm not sure that we are, otherwise we could hardly communicate, but I do think we are looking at the whole situation and the questions related thereto from very different angles - not, I think, diametrically opposed but certainly at different points of the compass. I'm reminded of a conversation I had with the present Bishop of Southwark, who, having been seen as a bit of a liberal in his previous Diocese, was surprised to find himself seen as rather a conservative in this one! Similarly, what you intended to be read as an acknowledgement that "JSC processes were nowhere near as flawed as some were claiming" came across to me as very much an identification of the flaws in the process, and I'm glad that you have clarified that.

In terms of the history of the Communion, again, I think we're not in parallel universes, but I was trying to make the point that the last ten years can be viewed in very different ways - as so often, I was trying to say, we interpret history in the way which most reflects our understanding of the present.

That doesn't mean, I hope, that we spin off into a postmodern inability to find common ground, and I'm glad that you moved on to the specific questions about human sexuality and relationships. I'm particularly glad because although I take your point about the political questions, neither you nor I are in a position to influence events very much. But the Communion is in the situation it's in because there has been a radical breakdown in communication, as a result of a number of events including Lambeth 1.10 and the consecration of Gene Robinson. So the "spirit of enmity", which Jenny Te Paa powerfully identified at Drenched in Grace, does seem to be tightening its grip on the Communion in a way which I think it's important to name and to acknowledge so that we can try to remove its power.

The Archbishop of Canterbury talks about "facts on the ground" which we have to acknowledge even though they make dialogue difficult, and two of those are the consecration of Gene and Lambeth 1.10. Neither are going to go away. But I wonder if, responding to your invitation to return to the substantive issue, that it might be helpful to do a little "living as if" and imagine that you and I are having this conversation on Neptune, beyond the reach of Communion politics.

I very much appreciated your (not especially blunt!) answers to my questions, and your clarification of your present position. We bring our assumptions and I am certainly guilty of wanting a high degree of clarity in discussions, partly because I have perhaps ascribed to you views which don't do you justice but which are frequently expressed by others in these debates!

I think, in that context, the quotation from Oliver O'Donovan is fascinating. As I think I said in an earlier letter, I thought his "Good news for Gay People" piece was very powerful, partly because it ended with a further plea for serious theological work to be done in this area. If I dare to paraphrase your quotation, I think he's saying that the "faithful homosexual Christian" (meaning, I think, a non-celibate faithful homosexual Christian) is in a position where the Church, because of a consensus reading of scripture and tradition, cannot have a "ceremonial endorsement". She is in a grey area where the church can (even though it doesn't always!) respect her integrity and recognise the seriousness of her stance, but it is not in a position to grant the same recognition to her relationship that it can to married couples.

This, I think, bears comparison to the Archbishop of Canterbury's view (if I understand it rightly) that the consecration of Gene Robinson, whatever the rights and wrongs of that consecration, was carried out before the Communion was ready to confer the legitimacy of episcopacy on a non-celibate faithful homosexual Christian. In other words, the institution of the church isn't ready to confer its blessing on individual Christians even though it might be able to respect their conscientiously held positions.

I hope I'm right in interpreting what you and he say because I think it gives real ground for engagement. Of the four questions you ask, I'd like to set three aside - the ones about the views of the rest of the Communion on same-sex blessings, the consecration of Gene and the "TEC experiment" because, as I said, we're now on Neptune. But the third question:

"Must I do this despite the fact that the moral disciplines of these relationships of love between people of the same gender have never been clearly stated and agreed even within those local churches taking this path?"

returns a strong echo to my desire throughout this correspondence to try to engage with you in the task of beginning to try to define exactly what the moral disciplines of these relationships of love might be. It's absolutely the heart of the church's task, in this area, I think, to try to develop an ethic of relationship which is appropriate and supportive for people outside marriage as well as within, for people seeking long-term commitment as well as those within it.

I do want to say, too, that I think there is also a vast amount of work to be done on the status given to marriage in some traditions. It feels, at times, as though marriage has been exalted above almost everything else as a criterion for membership of the church, which doesn't fit at all comfortably with what we know of Jesus or of his disciples! I've recently read two books which very powerfully challenge the present place of marriage in (particularly evangelical) theology on the basis of New Testament scholarship - "Jesus'

Family Values" by Deirdre Good and "Sex and the Single Savior" by Dale Martin - but what they're saying is hardly new.

The Ephesian moment, when the church in Ephesus was presented with its challenge, was about finding an answer to the question - what do we do when cultures collide? The Ephesians learnt from each other, and moved into a new place. The question is, can we?

I liked your categorisations in last month's Fulcrum newsletter, of those whose position on these matters varies from "rejectionists" on the hard conservative end of the spectrum through "reasserters" to "reassessors" and "reinterpreters" on the more inclusive end. Perhaps you would identify yourself as a "reasserter" - I certainly would put myself somewhere between a reassessor and a reinterpreter because, while I believe passionately that the inclusion of lesbian and gay people at all levels of the church is a matter of God's justice for us and vital for the health of the church, I believe that we should do our very best to engage those with whom we disagree at the profoundest levels so that, with hope, the church can move together on this. Or find a way to live generously together which acknowledges difference without walking apart. I'm not sure where that puts me on your ecclesiological spectrum.

But my goodness, it's difficult. I'm quite sure that one of the reasons this debate is so toxic is because it contains within it issues of power and patriarchy, identity and otherness, scriptural interpretation and conceptions of God which are all very close to the heart of the faith each of us has. I'm sure that for some people, rejecting LGBT practice is the last possible stand against the onward march of a godless modernity, while for others welcoming lesbian and gay people is the vital move which the church must make if it is to have a future. Hmmm. And behind it all is the huge question of sexuality, which the church has hardly begun to address in any way which is at all meaningful. I realised at the Drenched in Grace conference (which was very successful and a remarkable meeting, yes, thanks) that there is a big gulf of understanding on questions of sexuality even between "inclusive" people, let alone between those who take such different views on the questions we're addressing.

Tradition and the consensus of church history certainly plays a large part in the debate. But I have to say that I think that appeals to tradition and consensus are of only limited usefulness. Even if the majority of Christians think something, that certainly doesn't automatically make it right. It's been often repeated but remains true that most Christians supported slavery and justified it biblically until the early nineteenth century; that most Christians opposed the full inclusion of women and justified it biblically until towards the end of the twentieth century (and possibly the majority still does); and that Martin Luther when he nailed his Theses to the door of Wittenberg Church was not acting with the support of the majority or in accordance with church tradition! I'm sure that we would both agree that the ending of slavery, the ordination of women and the Reformation were Good Things - so while I accept that tradition and consensus has a place, I certainly think it's very secondary in issues such as this and has to be treated with great caution. The majority, after all, in this country are in favour of capital punishment but that doesn't make it right.

A danger is that we become binary on this, with one side saying "we must move" and the other side saying "we will not be moved." Result, misery.

There is another possibility. The reason I keep requesting time on this, and asking that the Lambeth Conference be a real conference where people come together with all their questions and their concerns rather than a theatre for political point-scoring, is because I think we all have to go, very humbly, back to the Bible and back to the tradition. We have to ask, somehow, whether our understandings of what we are hearing from Scripture about relationships and sexuality are right, or whether we are reading Scripture from a position where it is being used to justify our own positions. And then we have to look at the tradition and see if it is really as monolithic as we think it is; or whether, in fact, throughout history attitudes towards relationships and sexuality have been much more complicated than we in the West with our idealisation of the nuclear family are willing to acknowledge. And finally we have to use the fullest reach of our reason to understand what it is we are dealing with - what human sexuality is, how it impacts on our personhood and our relationships, and how it affects and is impacted by our faith. Scripture, reason and tradition.

Being honest with you, Andrew, I have to say that our correspondence, together with my other involvements in the church beyond the parish, has enabled me to understand these questions very differently - not that I have changed my mind on the need for full inclusion, but that I understand more clearly some of the reasons why others find it so unacceptable. Clearly, and beyond doubt, there is great homophobia and great fear around, and a sense for some that "their" church is being taken away. That's not something with which I have great sympathy; we are all called to change and be challenged, and homophobia is no more acceptable than racism or sexism. But genuine perplexity over these issues and a sense that the church is not ready is something which I can understand even if I find it deeply frustrating.

So, hesitantly, I suggest that we could next spend some time investigating scripture, going beyond the immediate references to same-sex relationships and trying to work out what scripture as a whole is saying. I'm not, I hasten to say, a biblical scholar, but I am writing a book on these matters so I really should be able to put forward a coherent position!

To finish, though, I want to reaffirm that none of this would matter at all were it not for the absolutely vital part of both our callings - which is to care for and to build up the People of God. None of this would have any meaning for me were it not to grow out of my parish, the place in which I am rooted and which I serve. In the end, it is (after God) from the parish that I get my inspiration. And I am completely convinced that it is the breadth and the depth of our congregation, from traditional Nigerians to very openly partnered gay men, from single vulnerable women to confident senior academics, which enables the Spirit to move with such quiet but undeniable power in this place. That's why I won't let go; because I owe it to my congregation to try to make the Church of England a place in which it is safe for them to thrive.

As ever,

Giles

[Goddard2Goddard letter 14: Andrew to Giles \(13th Dec 2007\)](#)

13th December 2007

Dear Giles,

Thanks for yours on 2nd December – let’s see if we can start to “perform” even if it means moving to Neptune to do so. I want to pick up your renewed invitation – in the light of the third of my four questions - to “try to engage...in the task of beginning to try to define exactly what the moral disciplines of these relationships of love might be...to try to develop an ethic of relationship which is appropriate and supportive for people outside marriage as well as within, for people seeking long-term commitment as well as those within it”. I’m purposefully going to try to focus on areas I think and hope we can largely agree on and to express them in a way that they can gain a wide consensus rather than starting with areas I know we are going to find more difficult to address though I’m sure we’ll come to those.

My starting point is Genesis 2.18 – “The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone”” – and the belief that, made in the image of the Triune God, all human beings are made for relationships. Of course in the text God goes on to say, “I will make a helper suitable for him” and we have the story of the creation of the woman which ends “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (v24). I would not, however, want to say that this means everyone should marry – how could any Christian suggest that in the light of the life lived by the one we say is truly human, the (to use the title of Dale Martin’s book that we might discuss at some point) “Single Savior”? You are right to warn that - perhaps particularly in certain evangelical circles – “it feels, at times, as though marriage has been exalted above almost everything else” (although “as a criterion for membership of the church” is perhaps a little too strong in my view). That narrative does, though, highlight the importance and significance of the distinction between men and women and I would say also points to the - in some sense - privileged status of marriage among our various loving relationships. Here there is the divinely ordained and instituted relationship between a man and a woman in which there is a total self-giving in intention life-long. This is particularly symbolised and embodied in their sexual union (‘becoming one flesh’) that is by God’s creative purpose the means of the miracle of the gift of new life and thus the creation of a totally new relationship. Marriage is a central part of God’s response to our universal need for relationship to counter the lack of being alone. It also, in the rest of Scripture, becomes a symbol (or even perhaps sacrament) of God’s gracious covenantal love and his determination not to be alone but to be for us and in relationship with us.

That linking between God’s relationship to us and our relationships with each other is not, however, restricted to marriage. It means, I believe, that all our relationships are called to be relationships of love - “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 Jn 4.11) - even relationships with our enemies! In practice of course none of our relationships – not even our best marriages or best relationships with fellow Christians - are pure love. They are instead a mix of self-giving love for the good of others and sinful attitudes and behaviour driven by self-interest, self-preservation, self-aggrandisement, self-delusion etc. The challenge in all our relationships is to cultivate and encourage and bless

and honour that which is Christ-like and displaying the fruit of the Spirit and to put to death and resist all the powers that twist and distort relationships away from that pattern. What I think we are learning at present is that there are aspects of same-sex relationships that fall into the former category and to which the church has often been blind but we continue to disagree about how to encourage, bless and honour these in large part because we disagree as to what aspects of such relationships fall into the latter category and how determinative that is in moral evaluation of the relationship.

Alongside these general and universal features which I think should be part of an ethic for any relationship, there is also the fact that the forms and shape that love does and should take will vary depending on the nature of the relationship – I am called to love my students, my employer, my wife, my children, my fellow Christians, my neighbour – but what, in practice, it means for me to fulfil that call varies in each relationship. The obligations of love to each person vary and what is an action of love in one such relationship might be quite the opposite if done in another relationship. Or how we love and express love in one relationship may be destructive of love in another relationship by failing to recognise and respect it and the person in it – hence the problem of various forms of unfaithfulness or controlling/all-consuming relationships that damage other relationships.

Our actions are, of course, always physical because love (and of course all our denials and distortions of love) is expressed in and through our bodies – by our lips in how we speak and kiss, our hands in how we touch, our ears in how we listen, our eyes in how we look etc. And our bodies are, as Christians, not our own – “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?... Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body” (1 Cor 6.15, 19-20).

That means, of course, that we are not ultimately the ones to decide what it is right for us to do with our bodies – Jesus is Lord. Therefore what it means for us to express love in our relationships is not simply for us to determine on the basis of our own desires, reasoning, emotions or self-understanding. We need to be taught what it really means to love. We are – all of us, in all our relationships – disciples who are learning to love.

Glad to hear Drenched in Grace went so well and thanks for making so much of it available online. I have to say I was delighted (particularly after Giles Fraser’s recent critique of the ‘new Puritans’ he thought he’d found among conservative Anglicans in the US!) that the title apparently had its source in a Puritan writer. As you know, the Inclusive Church newsletter noted

We've found where the title "Drenched in Grace" comes from! Not a moment too soon, you might think. It's found in a sermon title "The Way of Life" by John Cotton, English Puritan divine, 1585—1652...Here's the passage in which the phrase appears: (with apologies for the exclusive language) “There is such a measure of grace as a man may swim as fish in the water. ... He runs the way of God’s Commandments, whatever he is to do or to suffer he is ready for all, so every way drenched in grace.

While being wary in my interpretation - without knowing its wider context - it does seem that this captures what I'm trying to say – that far from there being a contradiction between grace and obedience we are 'drenched in grace' when running the way of God's Commandments. In other words, to know what is and is not a true expression of love in a relationship we need to refer to and to heed God's commandments. We cannot simply appeal to 'love' as if its meanings and implications for our actions were self-evident or a matter of personal preference.

Furthermore, because we are inherently relational and part of a network of relationships I think that if love is to flourish we need to have some common mind about the proper structure of different relationships and the patterns of love which are fitting for them. Like me I guess you can think of times when misunderstandings here have created difficult and embarrassing situations. It may be that what was intended as a gesture of love and care was received as an inappropriate advance or that I expected that phone call or email from someone given the nature of our relationship or that something was said that revealed a different perception of the nature of the relationship – the first time I made clear to Lis what I thought the nature of our relationship had become was when I asked her if she thought many people knew we were going out!

I think one of the real challenges in much of Western society is that there is so little agreement on these areas. We privilege the right of every person to define the terms of their personal relationships and reject the idea that there are clear standards of what the obligations of love mean in various relationships. That of course is often particularly evident in relation to sexual expression in loving relationships – which, because it is so significant at every level (physically, emotionally, spiritually, psychologically) can be particularly damaging - but it goes much wider. It leads to confusion both within relationships (with different and perhaps conflicting understandings of what love means in this relationship) and on the part of those who relate to those in special relationships (who may be left unclear as to how, in their relationship with James, they honour and nourish the pattern of love that exists between James and Sam). That is, to my mind, one of the problems in the widespread practice and acceptance of co-habitation.

As those called to be the true humanity and to express in all our relationships the love of God in a manner that runs the way of God's commandments and is drenched in grace it is, I think, particularly important that the community of Jesus' followers does not fall prey to this corrosive element in Western society. That is, I think, another reason why some of us find unacceptable some of what appears to be part of "full inclusion" (for example the conclusions in Changing Attitude's publication with the Clergy Consultation entitled "Sexual Ethics"). It is partly why I stressed in my question that it was a problem that "the moral disciplines of these relationships of love between people of the same gender have never been clearly stated and agreed even within those local churches taking this path". To appear to be saying things like 'we need to accept and celebrate the diversity of loving relationships' or 'we can agree to differ on this as Christians' to my mind not only denies God's revealed will in relation to just and loving relationships but fuels rather than challenges this dangerous tendency of a sort of 'privatisation' of moral judgment and relationship definition.

I guess my big questions as we start this next stage in our now extra-planetary correspondence is whether I've been right to see what I've written as largely common ground, how you see "full inclusion" fitting with this task of discerning and commending a common Christian vision of human flourishing in loving relationships that has a definite and biblical content (and so critiquing and rejecting alternatives), and what that content looks like.

It may well now be the New Year before we correspond again. I hope you continue to have a hope-filled Advent (whatever Rowan's Advent letter says, to come back to Earth from Neptune) and a Christmas filled with joy and peace. I hope and pray that our conversation will continue and maybe find new forms of expression in the course of 2008.

Yours in Christ,
Andrew.

[Goddard2Goddard letter 15: Giles to Andrew \(24th Jan 2008\)](#)

24th Jan 2008

Dear Andrew

Thank you very much for your letter dated 13th December. I hope your Christmas and New Year were hopeful and filled with joy and that you look forward to 2008 after what was in many ways (for both of us) quite a depressing 2007.

In response to yours, I'd like, if I may, to cut to the chase and take your last question as the key issue. That is, "whether I've been right to see what I've written as largely common ground, how you see "full inclusion" fitting with this task of discerning and commending a common Christian vision of human flourishing in loving relationships that has a definite and biblical content (and so critiquing and rejecting alternatives), and what that content looks like."

It's very clear to me that you and I would be able to, if you like, agree a checklist of things which we would be able to identify in relationships which reflect a common Christian vision of human flourish. Permanence, stability, faithfulness, trust, honesty, mutual care and support, being outwardlooking, challenging and yet loyal - all of those things and more. The marks of a good relationship are those things which in some way reflect the constant relationship of love between God and God's people; clearly those things which do not reflect that are not conducive to human flourishing. I think, therefore, we can agree that we are both against sin!

But all of those factors can equally well be present in some of the other forms of relationship you mention – friendship, or family relationships, or even colleagues, and the Church doesn't have a problem with any of those. So we have to start engaging with the more crunchy issue, which is, of course, the place of sexual expression of love within same-gender relationships. I take absolutely your points about the physicality of all relationships and the corrosive nature of some modern practice (in both the straight and the LGBT worlds), but in that case it's even more important that we engage seriously with the place of sexual expression. I'm sure that we can both point to examples of people in same-gender relationships who reflect the love of God between themselves and in their relations with the world, but I think at the moment the place that I part company with the Church is that whereas I see their sexual expression as integral to the relationship's godliness the Church sees it as inimical.

I want to make two points and try to extrapolate from that what the place of sexual expression in loving relationships might be. First, I'm glad that you express so well the complexities of knowing what the loving thing to do is. "We are all human beings learning to love" - amen to that. Richard Burrige in his new book "Imitating Jesus" quotes Richard Hays, who is apparently concerned that love is "easily debased in popular discourse ... a cover for all manner of vapid self-indulgence." (quote on page 108 of *Imitating Jesus*). The Church's struggles at the moment are very precisely the result of the fact that we do not want love to be used as a cover for "all manner of vapid self-indulgence" and to argue from

such a fear to a position where we cannot use love as a guiding principle is hardly Christian, given that Jesus teaches us that there are only two commandments – to love God and love our neighbours as ourselves. It's the complexity of knowing what the loving thing to do is which explains why the Church cannot as yet come to a new mind on these questions.

But second, and I guess this is the heart of this particular letter (and maybe of our correspondence), I think that there is an assumption underlying your argument which explains why you see movement on this issue as so difficult. It's contained within the sentences "Therefore what it means for us to express love in our relationships is not simply for us to determine on the basis of our own desires, reasoning, emotions or self-understanding. We need to be taught what it really means to love" and "In other words, to know what is and is not a true expression of love in a relationship we need to refer to and to heed God's commandments."

The ten thousand million dollar question is – what are God's commandments? I hear two, from Jesus; love God and love your neighbour; I learn from this that "Christ is the end of the law." I find no commandments - simply some references whose meaning and implications are disputed - about the place of sex in same-gender relationships; rather, I find myself challenged to understand the place of sex in same-gender relationships in the context of the two great commandments we find in the Gospels.

As you know, I take seriously the notion of the Anglican theological method – the "milking stool" of the three strands of Scripture, Reason and Tradition whose complex interplay enables us continually to reflect on what we learn from scripture in the light of tradition using our reason. I deliberately do not include Experience as a fourth leg, not just because it spoils the milking stool analogy but because I do not believe that it is possible to separate our experience from the other three. The notion that we can come at scripture unaffected by our cultural, our social, our political and our personal context is not a notion that is sustainable. We understand tradition in the light of our experience; the way in which, for instance, we view the history of the place of women in society is inextricable from the place we believe women should now have. And reason and experience are bound up together; cultural context and intellectual reflection are locked in a sometimes virtuous and sometimes vicious circle. The exclusion of black people was thought, by impeccably reasonable people, to be intellectually justifiable for three hundred years (from the sixteenth to the mid twentieth century) but as the experience and voices of black people have begun to be heard in a less imperialist world, the same impeccably reasonable people have realised how unsustainable exclusion is.

This has crucial implications for our understanding of scripture. I seek to base my entire faith on a rigorous understanding of what we learn from the Bible as the key text in the interpretation of the central event in Christianity - the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ.

But we, as readers of scripture, do not come to it like blank sheets of paper waiting to be written on. We bring our cultural background, our language, our expectations, our preconceptions. We understand the past through the lens of the present, and we interpret

scripture through the lens of our faith and of our world. What is happening, when we read the scriptures, is that we are entering into a relationship with the text which is before us, and behind that with the almost always anonymous authors of the text; the past meets the future in the present, and we as readers are shaped by and shape our understandings of the words we read.

In short, we are graced, by the Holy Spirit, with our desires, our reasoning, our emotions and our self-understanding. All of these are inextricably bound up with our past and our present, with reason and tradition. It is the interplay between all these which gives faith in Jesus Christ its dynamic tension. So “to heed God’s commandments” is indeed what we must do, but we can’t do that in isolation from our *sitz-im-leben*, our position in life.

Of course our desires, our reasoning, our emotions and our self-understanding can be in error and distorted, and so can relationships. For the avoidance of doubt, I do not believe that “full inclusion” means that “anything goes.” I am absolutely clear that some sexual behaviour is deeply destructive and soulless and does long lasting damage. And we have the guidance of tradition to assist us in deciding what’s right and what’s wrong. But tradition is our guide, not our dictator. And I also think that the church is culpable in this area because it has so totally failed to develop a pastoral theology for lesbian and gay people; it has been left to the Government to create a legal position which, while deliberately not mentioning sexuality, enables gay and lesbian people to have their relationships affirmed by society. The church remains, appallingly, opposed.

I am absolutely clear too that close and committed relationships are, very often, immeasurably enriched by the physical expression of the love within them. You and I were both present at the General Synod debate last February in which Stephen Coles made a speech which I quote in full because it seems very relevant:

One thing that the registering of civil partnerships is making more possible is the revealing of relationships that have lasted for many years. Julian Litten has already referred to his of 31 years. Quite a few are over 40. Those relationships have survived despite the absence of any support from Church or State, and they challenge a situation in which many heterosexual relationships fail to survive despite considerable support from both Church and State. In those relationships sexual intimacy has usually played its part in helping a couple of very different human beings to express their feelings for one another and so to grow in love. So, like this morning, I am going to leave the Synod with a question. How many of you here who are happily enough married can honestly say that if you had never been allowed to express your feelings for your spouse physically your relationship would have the depth it has now?

I think this: that love is the beginning and end of the law, and a loving response to lesbian and gay Christians is not one which simply indulges. Instead, it calls them as it calls all people to the higher and more difficult way of commitment and covenant to God and to one another. As Dale Martin says, “The appeal to love will not solve all our problems or settle all our disagreements. But demanding that interpreters demonstrate that their condemnations of lesbian and gay Christians are “the loving thing to do” is at least preferable to the simple

statement that something is true just because “the Bible says so” or because it is “the will of God.”” (Page 168 of “Sex and the Single Savior”)

I want to turn the conversation round, really. I remain intrigued by your indication in an earlier letter that you substantially agree with Oliver O’Donovan on not ruling out a development in tradition in this matter – otherwise, of course, what would be the point of a listening process?

In that context (and in a Socratic way to answer a question with a question): if you acknowledge that a same-gender relationship may have integrity – which I take to mean a sexually active relationship, otherwise the possibility of any development must be meaningless – without the Church’s formal authorisation, what would a valid form of witness to Christian discipleship and holiness look like, which might allow the Church to be more accommodating and broaden its understanding of tradition on this matter? In other words, what would you consider reason enough for the Church to consider it an acceptable alternative to either celibacy or marriage in this case, given that you do not rule out the possibility of a development?

I hope I’ve gone some way to answering your question, and look forward to hearing from you -

With regards as ever

Giles

Goddard2Goddard letter 16: Andrew to Giles (8th March 2008)

8th March 2008

Dear Giles,

Sorry that once again – in part due to more ‘little local difficulties’ – I’ve taken a while to respond to your last letter. It was really good to spend a few days together along with others last month talking about many of the issues which we’ve been discussing and seeing some signs of hope that wider conversations might take place across what are often portrayed as unbridgeable divides.

As always there is so much I’d like to pick up and respond to in your letter but in addition to encouragement at a number of areas of common ground, a few things have been constantly on my mind as highlighting where we are still far apart and could perhaps benefit from further dialogue and so I’ll focus on them.

As you say, ‘we have to start engaging with the more crunchy issue, which is, of course, the place of sexual expression of love within same-gender relationships’. Your sentence at the end of that paragraph is I think the one that has kept haunting me ever since I first read it – ‘I think at the moment the place that I part company with the Church is that whereas I see their sexual expression as integral to the relationship’s godliness the Church sees it as inimical’. I appreciated your honest acknowledgment here that you part company not just with me but with ‘the Church’. I was also astonished at the way in which your soundbite summary captures why this is so crucial – how can the Church hold together and guide people in godliness when some are saying that something is integral to godliness which the Church declares to be inimical to it? We are here facing the stark fact that what you and others see as integral to being God-like in certain relationships, I and others see as embodying a rejection and denial of God’s character and purposes. Expressed like that I think we can see why this really cannot just be classed as ‘adiaphora’, ‘second-order’, somewhere where we can simply agree to differ and follow different practices.

Even more serious is the question of how we are going to resolve this fundamental incompatibility. Do you really mean it when you say (in response to “What are God’s commandments?”) that you answer this only by looking to Jesus and that when you do this you only find two commandments? I would have thought given your commitment to Scripture and the Anglican tradition you might have at least got the number of commandments into double figures! We talked early on – just over a year ago – about the Articles and I was encouraged that you said “I think they’re a neglected resource for the Church of England - I re-read them last year to remind myself of this particular foundational aspect of our Church and was pleased that I could find little to disagree with” I wonder how your reading of Scripture here fits with Article 7 – “The Old Testament is not contrary to the New...Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the Civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral”?

Your further claim is that you find “no commandments...about the place of sex in same-gender relationships”. This not only ignores the obvious commandments in Leviticus (about which we may talk more I guess) but also the clear warnings of Paul in the New Testament and Jesus’ commandments and teaching about sexual immorality. These, when they are responsibly set and interpreted in historical and cultural context as the words of a first-century Jew and received by us as the words of the incarnate Son of God cannot be understood to say nothing about the place of sex in same-gender relationships.

So, strong as the term is, I think you are right that the Church and I do see same-sex sexual expression as inimical to godliness. Where I really would love you to say more is what you mean by saying that you instead see it as – in certain contexts – “integral to the relationship’s godliness”. Not just “not inimical to” or “indifferent to” but “integral to”. I also want to know how on earth you hope to persuade me or others of this strong claim which runs counter to how the Church has read Scripture and understood the phenomenon for two thousand years.

I have to confess that part of my problem is that I’m not even sure in what sense I’d describe sexual expression in marriage between a man and a woman as “integral” to the relationship’s godliness. Or on what biblical or theological basis I’d make such a claim. This would seem to imply that were sex to be lacking (totally? for a period? even by mutual consent?) then the relationship would be falling short and lacking in godliness. In other words, marriage’s godliness is in some sense therefore dependent on sexual expression between husband and wife. Sex, you appear to be saying here, is necessary for certain types of relationship to be truly and fully godly. Now of course I want to say that sexual expression in marriage is good and I do find it hard to see how a “marriage” where there is no sexual expression at all (eg an unconsummated union) is truly marriage. So, I guess in one sense because sexual expression is integral to marriage and is good in marriage it can be said to be integral to marriage’s godliness. However, a non-sexual “marriage” (whatever that would mean) could still be a godly relationship and I’m not sure how within marriage one correlates godliness and sexual expression. Perhaps I’ve misunderstood your point but I guess I find the language of “integral to the relationship’s godliness” remarkably strong for the role of sexual expression in any relationship, even marriage. It may be of course that we need to be clearer about “integral to godliness” and more specific about how we understand “sexual expression”!

If I find this difficult in relationship to marriage I find it, to be honest, impossible to understand and justify in relation to same-sex relationships. Say I were to accept – which I obviously don’t – that there is no biblical teaching making clear such expression is inimical to godliness. Even if I grant that, I can see nothing at all in Scripture that would allow someone to claim it was “integral” to godliness. What is there in Scripture or in what you describe as “the central event in Christianity – the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ” that makes clear to us that certain relationships between people of the same sex are only truly godly if they include sexual expression of love? If there is nothing in these sources of authority on what basis am I to accept the claim that sexual expression is integral to certain relationships’ godliness? To return to the Articles again, Article 6 is clear that “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read

therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation”.

The answer you might give – forgive me if this is a false assumption – is that the integral nature of sexual expression is learned not from Scripture but from experience. That, I take it, is part of the rationale for your reference to Stephen Coles’ speech in General Synod and perhaps also what you hope may result from the Listening Process. My problem is that I’m not sure how an appeal to experience alone can determine whether or not certain behaviour is integral to a relationship’s godliness. Stephen’s speech of course did not make such a bold claim. His argument was – if I understand it correctly - that because the depth of relationship in marriage was related to being allowed to express your feelings for your spouse physically, sexual intimacy should be permitted (even encouraged) in loving same-sex relationships. The problem with this of course is that it assumes what it is trying to prove – that same-sex loving relationships are the same sort of loving relationship as marriage – and it shifts between “express your feelings...physically” and “sexual intimacy”.

This takes us back to some of what we’ve discussed in our last letters to each other. A lot of my deepest relationships – most notably with my children and other family members but also with close friends, both male and female – depend on physical expressions of my love and are deepened by that physical expression. There are, however, certain ways of expressing and deepening my love for my wife (the parallel Stephen drew in his speech) which we would all agree should not look to be replicated or paralleled in those relationships. But why can we not draw such parallels and analogies between those other relationships and marriage if we can draw them with (certain types – unspecified - of) same-sex relationships ?

The case that I think Stephen and you need to make – biblically and theologically - is (1) that there is some structure of relationship between people of the same sex that is, in God’s purposes, equivalent to marriage, (2) that in such relationships there are forms of sexual intimacy between people of the same sex which are equivalent to sexual intimacy between people of the opposite sex in marriage despite the biological differences and lack of procreative capacity, and (3) that such sexual intimacy (though never commended in Scripture and always condemned in Scripture – which itself therefore requires certain hermeneutical and perhaps other moves) is in fact intrinsic to the goodness, holiness, sanctity and godliness of such relationships whereas it would – to pick up your language – be inimical to godliness in any other sort of relationship.

I’d originally intended to end by addressing your final question to me about what reasons would need to be given to justify development in the Church’s thinking in this area but perhaps I’ve just done that, or at least begun to do it as I’m not sure these points cover everything (eg I think there would probably also need to be something about some people being made in God’s purpose as inherently and solely homosexually oriented).

One point of clarification is you seem to take me to hold that sexually active same-gender relationships can have integrity and I wonder if I’ve not expressed myself clearly here. I confessed back in my second letter in January last year that I had problems with the language of ‘integrity’ and we’ve come back to this term at various points though never

really pinned it down. On 12th November I quoted with approval some words of Oliver O'Donovan – “Relationships may have moral integrity in varying degrees without the church's formal authorisation. The integrity that is claimed for some homosexual unions does not depend on any ceremony”. The point here is not that I think they do have moral integrity but that if they do then they do so whether or not the church has a rite which recognises this fact. I really would like to explore further how what I've said here in response to the “integral to” vs “inimical to” question relates to this and so will end by floating some of my current thinking.

You obviously know that I do not believe the Church can bear witness that sexual expression in same-sex relationships is godly. That is why I find the language of “integrity” difficult. That is why I oppose the blessing of same-sex unions as currently proposed – it does seem in our context to entail the strong claims you make about sexual expression being godly, indeed integral to godliness. I can however acknowledge some degree of moral integrity in loving same-sex relationships while believing that sexual expression within them is inimical to that integrity and to their capacity to bear witness to Christ. I am also clear of course that all relationships – including all marriages - have patterns of (sexual but obviously much wider than that) behaviour within them that are also inimical to their capacity to bear witness to Christ. Those patterns may destroy the moral goods that are present in the relationship but they do not necessarily do so. It can therefore be the case that those goods can be acknowledged and nurtured and the relationship celebrated by the wider Church even when the goods are alongside behaviour inimical to godliness.

But what if the church were ever to say that some behaviour is integral to godliness which I believe Scripture declares to be inimical to it? What if the church were ever to bless relationships which claim to be godly but are founded on ungodly behaviour which the church simply ignores or even commends? Then, I am afraid, I am with the great contemporary German theologian Pannenberg who writes that

Here lies the boundary of a Christian church that allows itself to be bound by the authority of Scripture. Those who urge the church to change the norm of its teaching on this matter must know that they are promoting schism. If a church were to let itself be pushed to the point where it ceased to treat homosexual activity as a departure from the biblical norm, and recognized homosexual unions as a personal partnership of love equivalent to marriage, such a church would stand no longer on biblical ground but against the unequivocal witness of Scripture. A church that took this step would cease to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

The question therefore I would put back in return to yours to me about development is one about how – as someone who conscientiously dissents from the Church's moral judgment in this area – you are willing in practice to relate to the reality of the Church's stance. Given you acknowledge the Church holds same-sex behaviour to be inimical to godliness, how are you prepared to respect that stance even as you dissent from it? Are you willing to help me and the wider Church find ways - while we hold that moral stance - to acknowledge and support (pastorally and perhaps even liturgically) the goods that are to be found in loving same-sex relationships and in the lives of those in such relationships? Or is your conviction about the place of sexual expression of love within same-gender relationships so

fundamental and so firmly held that the only solution you can accept is one that requires us to abandon the “inimical” stance and to allow the Church to embrace your “integral to godliness” view?

Look forward to hearing from you and with prayers for you and your parish this coming Holy Week and Easter as we remember together Christ’s passion and his destruction of the dividing wall of hostility to bring peace and reconciliation.

Yours in Him,

Andrew